

DERLETH

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THE

SOLAR PONS

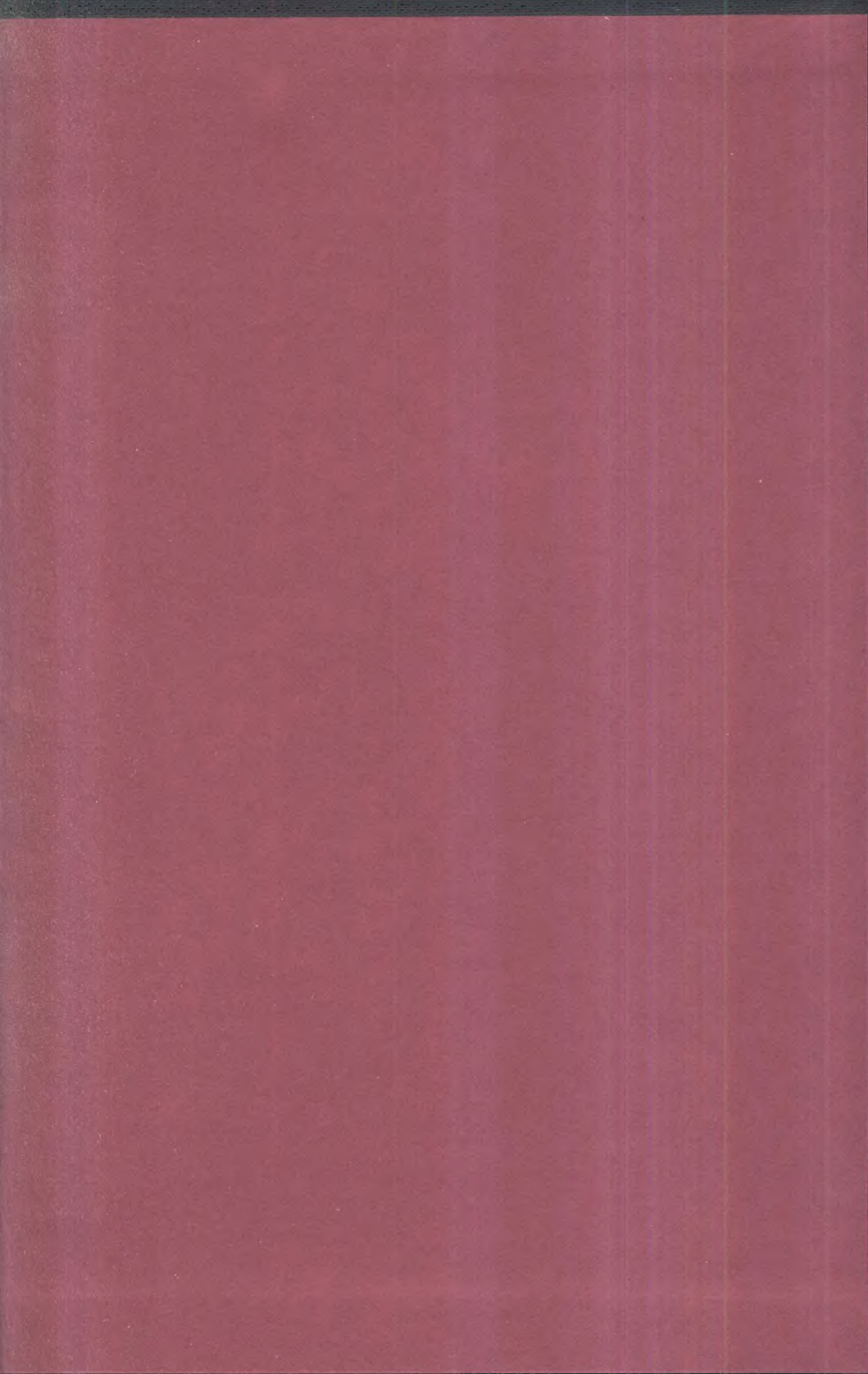
OMNIBUS

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VOLUME I

ARKHAM HOUSE





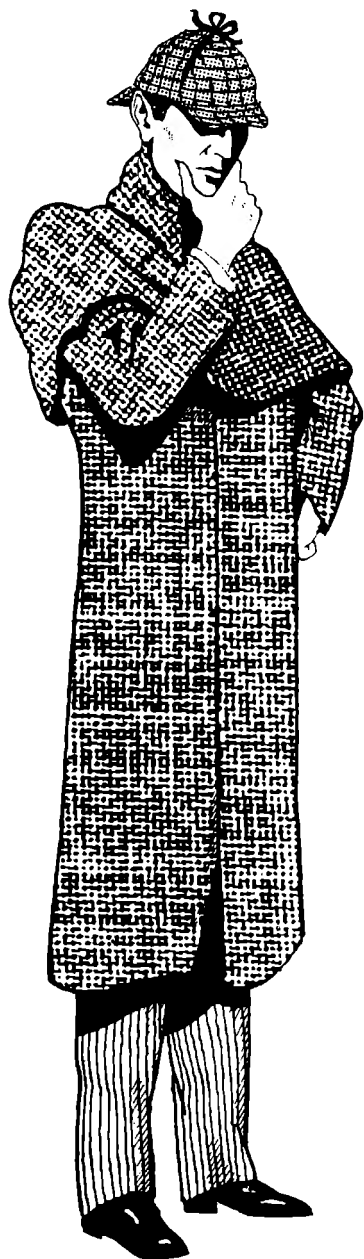




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**A MYCROFT & MORAN BOOK**





AUGUST DERLETH

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*The*  
*Solar Pons Omnibus*

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VOLUME ONE

EDITED BY BASIL COPPER  
WITH DRAWINGS BY FRANK UTPATEL  
AND A FOREWORD BY ROBERT BLOCH

ARKHAM HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.

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## *Foreword*

IN 1965, during my first visit to London, I made a pilgrimage to Praed Street.

But as I drew closer to the teeming tumult of Paddington Station, my mind was far away—over thirty years and four thousand miles away—returning to Sauk City, Wisconsin, and my first visit with August Derleth.

Sauk City in the thirties was a sleepy village with nary a suggestion of London about it, and in that prejet era the four-thousand-mile span separating the two communities seemed an almost insurmountable distance to Midwesterners like Derleth and myself.

People in our time and circumstances were forced to rely upon the only method of transportation which our finances permitted—we journeyed through time and space by book. Writers were our tour guides and the printed page our passport to other lands and other days.

Thus it was that we embarked on imaginary exploration of the great world beyond. And inevitably our travels brought us to the London of Sherlock Holmes.

We did not go alone. The foggy streets of the late-Victorian metropolis proved a universally popular destination, and there was always the promise of high adventure when the game was afoot. Millions of others in our stay-at-home generation made the same trip via the same route.

But Derleth and I were in some ways different from most of our fellow readers. Blessed—or cursed—with a creative imagination, we were not entirely satisfied to follow the beaten paths mapped out by other explorers. We had already left the guided tour to wander through worlds of our own devising. We had learned the secret of traveling in style—and discovered that we, as authors, could write our own ticket.

Thus it was that in those far-off days Derleth ventured to far-off lands at will, forsaking the familiar for the fantastic. Not that he permanently abandoned Sauk City; anyone reading the many volumes comprising his *Sac Prairie Saga* will recognize Derleth's lasting affinity for his birthplace. His roots were deep in native soil, and he cultivated it richly.

But even the most dedicated home-lover enjoys an occasional vacation, and Derleth often chose London as his home away from home. Armchair journeys into the realm of English fantasy were augmented by typewriter trips mounted on his own, resulting in ghost stories with similar backgrounds.

Based on this precedent, it seemed quite natural that, having exhausted the resources of the resourceful Sherlock Holmes, he would seek to supplement them with further excursions in the company of a surrogate figure of his own choice and creation.

Hence Solar Pons was born, and grew, and flourished apace. Over the years Derleth earned and enjoyed a reputation as a writer of pastiches in many genres. Among such efforts, there seems little doubt that the Pontine Canon is his most redoubtable achievement.

During a span of almost a century there have been literally hundreds of Sherlockian imitations, ranging from parody to direct duplication, but no one except August Derleth ever succeeded in capturing the essential charm of Doyle's original concept.

Doyle is dead, but Sherlock Holmes is immortal.

Derleth is gone, but Solar Pons lives on. And I like to think that the Praed Street stories survive because they were created not out of envy, rivalry, or ridicule, but out of love.

Sitting late at night in the slumbering silence of a tiny Midwestern town, poring over the street maps of a great city he had never seen, Derleth fashioned the annals of a doppelgänger detective who took on an independent and legitimate literary identity. To Pons's exploits he brought not only *expertise* but evident expression of his respect, appreciation, and affection for the source of their inspiration. Viewed as Holmesian homage or as a character in his own right, Solar Pons became Derleth's personal guide to an enchanted time and place.

The Praed Street of which Derleth dreamed, and on which I walked, has never truly existed as portrayed in the stories of this omnibus collection. And yet, thanks to August Derleth, we can journey there, just around the corner, in the only real world all of us inhabit—the world of imagination.

Turn these pages and you'll find it.

ROBERT BLOCH

# *The Solar Pons Omnibus*





## *From the Notebooks of Dr. Lyndon Parker*

WITHIN A FEW months of my joining Solar Pons in his quarters at 7B, Praed Street, and before I turned to chronicling his cases at full-length, I began to keep a notebook—not one of daily accounting, but only of random jottings, having become interested enough in his methods to seek to preserve some of his feats. For, in addition to adventures I later set down, there were many instructive moments in his company, and many lesser problems that came and went, that I wished to set down in some fashion for my own edification, and, later, to refresh my memory, since the memory of man is fallible, and time diminishes it or distorts what is locked in it. The entries that follow all date back to my first year at 7B.

*17 August 1919*

After a brief lecture on the art of observation and deduction in a pub in Camden Town today, Pons singled out a disgruntled-looking young man of not over thirty sitting by himself and put me to the test.

"What do you make of him, Parker?"

"A labourer," I said.

"Too general," retorted Pons.

"He is upset and brooding about something. His face is morose, he hardly touches his ale."

"Capital!" cried Pons. "Go on."

"He seems to be engaged in some sort of manual labour. His hands are rough."

Pons looked at me keenly, his eyes twinkling. "Nothing more?"

"Except that he seems to have come away hastily. He is in his working clothes."

"Well, that is a good beginning," said Pons. "You have really missed only a few little details. Come, let us just go over and talk with him."

So saying, he rose and led the way to the corner where the object of our attention glowered into his ale. The fellow did not look up when we came to pause before him.

"Forgive me for interrupting your black mood," said Pons, "but perhaps your wife will come around and you can patch up your quarrel."

The fellow looked up, amazement spreading across his face. After a brief hesitation, he growled, "I'm done with that."

"Things are never as black as they seem," pursued Pons. "Perhaps by this time she has contemplated your wedding ring long enough to reflect on her position."

"It's the first time I took it off," he answered.

"You are by trade a mason?"

"Aye."

"Specifically, a brick-layer."

He nodded.

"Left-handed, I see."

The fellow now gazed at Pons with increasing bewilderment.

"Childless, too."

"Look here, I don't know your game. . . ." The fellow pushed back his chair and would have got up, had not Pons dropped a coin to the table in front of him.

"Have another pint, young man," he said, and walked away.

Once outside, Pons explained the simplicity of it. "The fellow's dark mood coupled with the fact that the band of relatively clean skin on his ring finger betrayed the recent removal of what could only have been a wedding ring suggested that he and his wife had quarreled. He would not be likely to take himself off so violently if there were children to consider.

"As for his calling—the fingertips of his right hand show the worn, shiny stigma of the brick-layer. Since the mason habitually lays bricks with his left hand while his right is busy with the trowel, it follows that our man is left-handed. Always, in scrutinizing anyone, look for the stigmata of his calling—if there be such. Observe, for instance, this slender young man approaching us. What do you make of the mark on his neck not far below his left ear?"

I looked as closely as I could at the area Pons designated, and identified it as an acneform dermatergosis.

"But what does it tell us?" asked Pons. "That is an area too high to be irritated by his collar."

I could not guess.

"Why, it is plain as a pikestaff that he plays either the violin or the viola, and I submit that it is the violin. The mark is

characteristic of an irritation caused by holding that instrument alongside the chin and against the neck."

28 September 1919

In our quarters today Pons surprised me by saying, "I have often reflected upon the fact that you have been somewhat less than comprehensive in your account of yourself to me, Parker."

"Why do you say so?" I asked.

"You have impressed me with the Order of Osmanieh bestowed upon you by the Khedivial Government as well as with His Majesty's Government's commission to continue the work at Mansura, Egypt. You have spoken of your education at Dover College, University College, and Heidelberg, and I have been privileged to read your series of articles on ophthalmia in *The Lancet*. But you are curiously reticent about your years in America. Yet they must have been of some duration."

"Ten years," I said reluctantly.

"You have fallen rather pronouncedly into the American idiom and I observe that you speak what can best be described as semi-American."

"I am not aware of it," I replied, I fear, somewhat stiffly.

"Oh, it is unmistakable," persisted Pons. "Let me illustrate. Only this morning you spoke of a shop's being 'on' the Edgware Road, whereas we customarily say that it is 'in' this or that street. The American, however, usually says 'on.' You referred yesterday, in speaking of that unfortunate matter of the Curate's Mistake, to a 'stoop' when any Englishman would have said 'porch.' I cite but these two examples, of what I should say is an Englishman's speaking semi-American. You seem to have been spared some of the curious accents affected by Americans, however."

"Ah, that entire period is a painful one for me," I said.

"You did not enjoy your sojourn in the States?"

"No, it was not that. I was graduated from Columbia and then for two years, to 1903, I served as principal medical officer for the Allegheny Sheet & Tube Corporation. Those years were pleasant enough."

"Ah, it was your marriage."

"Say, rather, its unfortunate ending. Louisa's death in the *Titanic* disaster ended not only an entire period in my life, but a kind of life. The war followed hard upon it, and our world has

changed since then. I have closed that door—Praed Street is as far from those American years as from my Egyptian sojourn.”

With this he appeared to be satisfied, or, out of delicacy, said no more.

11 October 1919

*Pons on Calluses, &c.* “Certain calluses are almost invariable. The stone-cutter, for instance, is likely to have a broad callus at the base of the little finger of his left hand, on the back, of course, where the chisel rests on the finger. A trumpet player—or a tuba player, for that matter—is likely to show a callus on the right little finger, whereas that of the French horn player will show on the left little finger. The jeweler or engraver may show calluses in several specific places, including the palm of the hand, the tips of thumb and index finger, particularly of the left hand.

“Men who work with coal tar and petroleum derivatives may show melanosis of exposed parts of their bodies, and anyone working with tetryl in any form is apt to show the red and yellow stains on skin and hair, whereas silversmiths tend to absorb enough silver to give a characteristic slate grey colour to their skin.

“You will yourself be familiar with the stigmata of disease.”

12 October 1919

I had been reading Pons's *The Varieties of the Criminal Method*. When I put the book down, I asked him whether there was such a thing as “the criminal type.”

“I fear that is a fallacy,” said Pons. “The fault for its existence is probably traceable to Lombroso, who held that there was such a thing.”

“But you will admit that certain people look like criminals.”

“Nonsense. They may perhaps fit the viewer's concept of what a criminal ought to look like, no more.”

He got up and took down his files. From them he abstracted four photographs and laid them before me.

“Which of these is the criminal?” he asked.

“I suspect they are all criminals or you wouldn't have them in your files.”

“On the contrary. Logical as your deduction is, your conclusion is false.”

I examined the photographs carefully and finally selected one.

“Why?” asked Pons.

"You have only to look at him—the beetling brow, the shifty eyes, the thick-lipped sensuous mouth, the cauliflower ear. The fellow looks evil."

"And the others do not?"

"No."

"Why do you say so?"

"Well, look at the first one. There is an ascetic face, if ever I saw one," I said. "The fellow looks like a minister."

"He was. The Reverend Athelny Foster."

I fear I chuckled in triumph.

"Of Chipping Fulham. The name means nothing to you?"

"It is surely enough that I identified his calling."

"He poisoned his wife in favour of a barmaid," said Pons dryly. "Next?"

"This one is as dignified as a Sunday School Superintendent."

"You name him so?"

"No. A judge or a lawyer. And so is the other."

Pons laughed in that way of his I should describe as "heartless." "The one is a swindler of some renown—Patrick Donovan. The other is indeed a lawyer—Charles Convers. He suffocated a client in order to conceal his peculations from his estate."

"And what did the 'criminal type' do?"

"He caught them. He was the late Commissioner John Flinders of New Scotland Yard. I trust that will curb your romanticism."

*17 October 1919*

A lady called to see Pons today. She gave her name as Mrs. Rose Murray. She was simply dressed and wore a little straw hat with straw flowers decorating it, together with a bit of black cloth.

"A seamstress, I see," said Pons.

"Yes, sir," she said. "I didn't think it so plain to tell I made my own clothing."

"The mark of the thimble is easy to see on your finger," said Pons. "Not long widowed?"

"My husband was killed last March in an accident on the Great Western," she replied. "I have quite got over it, though."

"Not quite enough to remove that bit of crepe on your hat, and yet enough to call yourself by your own Christian name rather than his."

"Yes, that is true."

"And what can I do for you, Mrs. Murray?"

"Why, Mr. Pons, I am an acquaintance of your landlady, and since you and Dr. Parker are bachelors, I took it you might have some sewing for me to do."

19 October 1919

Pons's persisting habits—

He toys with his ear, pulls at the lobe—usually his left, when in deep thought. (Freud would have something to say about this!) He also closes his eyes frequently to concentrate the better.

He is an attentive listener. Sitting, he tends to tent his fingers. Standing, he leans against the mantel most frequently. On occasion he paces back and forth, hands clasped behind him.

His eyes seem alternately grey or grey-green. They seem to be extraordinarily keen and alive. He seems to miss nothing. His glance is quick—"darting" would be the word, and he seems to look into one.

He smokes the most abominable shag ever prepared by the hand of man. I could believe it to be a mixture of cabbage leaves, string, and the Chinese tea smoked from the burning of yak dung. He keeps it wherever the fancy suits him—the coal-scuttle, the toe of a slipper, the pen holder, etc.

He delights to display his deductive powers, but at the same time he vastly appreciates it when the joke is on him.

He is devoted to his Inverness and deerstalker, but I wonder sometimes if he does not wear them for effect only. (If that is blasphemy—*mea culpa*.) He has dressing-gowns in several colours, all dark—and all well worn. He shows no inclination to get himself a new robe.

He is much given to disguising himself. He fancies, because he has deceived me so readily several times, that he is very good at disguise, forgetting that, as he has pointed out on even more occasions, I am not as observant as I ought to be.

7 November 1919

Inspector Jamison called today to lay a problem before Pons. He was apologetic about its trivial nature—repeated house-breaking in Park Lane—but it was evident that he was vexed about it, nevertheless. He gave an account of seven burglaries all within two adjoining streets, and ended finally with, "The crux of the matter, Pons, is its senselessness."

"I daresay its meaning has not yet become evident," said Pons dryly.

"Every one a clumsy break-in, and nothing of value taken."

"An amateur's work, clearly?"

"No doubt of it."

"Or made to seem so. Let me see, now," Pons went on, leaning back in his chair at the fireplace, his eyes closed, his fingers tented before him. "A Chinese piece stolen at the Forrer home?"

"Value about one pound," said Jamison.

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing. One item from each house."

"A gold-plated pen from the Beston house."

Jamison shrugged. "Ten shillings—if that. It wasn't the loss Beston resented so much as the breakage—a pane of the back door broken in while they were gone."

"In all cases the householders were absent," mused Pons. "So the burglar seemed to have some knowledge of their movements."

"Yes, yes, Pons—all that is elementary," said Jamison impatiently. "What good did it do him to watch these houses if all he meant to take was some trifling article? That's the work of an imbecile."

"I would not say so," said Pons. "The most expensive item taken appears to have been a cheap brooch from the Kendall home," he went on.

"Under two pounds value," said Jamison.

"And entry, if I understood you, seems to have been made in every case before midnight."

"In two cases before half-past ten. The householders got home by ten-thirty."

Pons smiled. "This suggests nothing to you, Jamison?"

"The man's a fool. Or he means to be a nuisance. Perhaps he wants to put the wind up somebody in that neighbourhood."

"I submit it is more than that," said Pons with an annoying habit, which I had observed before, of saying too little.

"I suppose next you will be telling me to look for a short fat man with a limp, who smokes nothing but imported cigars and is supporting his mother-in-law," said Jamison with heavy sarcasm.

Pons laughed heartily. "I regret I cannot oblige you this time, Jamison. I think the honour of catching him must be yours. But then," he added, his eyes dancing, "it always has been, has it not?"

"You *can* describe him then?" asked Jamison, incredulous.

"I do not know whether he is short or tall, fat or lean," said Pons, "and at this point, I am sorry to say, the case does not seem in-



teresting enough to challenge me. And, if I may say so, it is too elementary."

Jamison got to his feet as abruptly as his bulk permitted. "I shall have to look elsewhere."

"I suggest you sit tight and let him betray himself."

"Ah, and how many times will he have to make a burglarious entry before then?"

"I rather think he has done almost as many as he needs to do," continued Pons. "At any time now he will make a mistake."

Jamison's interest quickened. "What sort of mistake?"

"He will steal something of value. Perhaps of great value. And something certain to be heavily insured. You will then, of course, investigate thoroughly the financial situation of the gentleman who reports the theft. I submit you will find that all the other burglaries were performed only to make his own loss credible. I can foresee the headlines: *Inspector Jamison Scores Again!*"

"And if nothing of the sort happens?" asked Jamison sceptically.

"Then by all means call on me again and I will be happy to look into the matter."

18 November 1919

At my place at breakfast this morning, Pons, who had gone out, had left the morning paper with a small item circled in red crayon. "Inspector Jamison Scores," I read. "Mr. Geoffrey Thompson was taken into custody this morning and charged with a series of burglaries in the Park Lane area. Mr. Thompson had only two days ago reported himself as the victim of such a burglary, having lost a valuable pearl necklace belonging to his wife. . . ." No mention of Pons, of course; but that is how he prefers it.

21 November 1919

A short man, introducing himself as Mr. Howard Robinson, retired, came to see Pons this morning. He was not over five feet in height, and thin almost to cadaverousness. His bearing was military. A moustache he wore would on almost anyone else have looked fierce, but on him had the appearance of something attached for effect. He had rough hands.

"I have, Mr. Pons, a rather delicate problem." I observed that he pronounced "ra-ther" in two distinct and separate syllables. "Late yesterday I received a sealed envelope in which my solicitor forwarded to me a certain legacy in bank-notes. While the covering

letter was enclosed, the bank-notes were not. Yet the seal was unbroken. My solicitor is a man of the utmost honesty, so that one of the three persons through whose hands this envelope passed from him to me must have taken the bank-notes. But how? I looked in on Thorndyke, but he was in Scotland. I took the liberty of coming to you without an appointment."

All prim and proper, and very business-like.

"You have the envelope, Mr. Robinson?" asked Pons.

"Yes, sir."

Robinson produced it, carefully wrapped in gauze, from a pocket-case of hard leather. He handed it to Pons.

"I see by its shape that it certainly did at one time contain something of bulk," said Pons at once.

"I thought so. I opened it with an opener. The letter, you see, has plainly been wrapped around something—certainly the bank-notes."

"Let us just see." So saying, Pons carried the envelope over to the corner of our quarters where he amused himself with chemicals. He sat down there, took up his magnifying glass, and studied the seal. I heard him chuckle. "Pray step over here, Mr. Robinson."

Robinson did so. I was at his heels.

"See there, sir," said Pons, pointing to a mere speck of grey on the maroon wax of the seal. "This is plaster of Paris. Someone took off the seal and replaced it."

"But how, sir?"

Pons leaned back. "Why, by a common method indeed. Someone oiled the seal and poured on to it some freshly burned plaster of Paris. As soon as it was set, the seal was raised. After the money was taken out of the envelope, the seal was renewed from the oiled mould. It is almost inevitable that flakes or grains of the plaster will stick to the seal. There is evidence here that some grains were removed."

"It will hold up in court?"

"Any competent witness can testify to it successfully."

"Would you be willing to do so?"

"If I am called upon, Mr. Robinson. If I am called upon," said Pons. He stood up so suddenly that Mr. Robinson fell back. "That will be two pounds, sir."

"Two—two pounds?" stuttered Robinson.

"Two pounds," said Pons with such finality that Robinson paid him forthwith.

He bowed himself out.

Pons threw the notes to the table and walked over to the window to watch our late client emerge from 7B.

"Nature provides an infinite variety in mankind," he reflected. "What did you make of him, Parker?"

"An ex-military man," I said at once.

"Capital!" said Pons. "But obvious. It has been a long time since he was in military service."

"And a man accustomed to clerical work."

"Ah, you make progress. You saw the typical middle-finger callus of a man who has used a pen for a long time. Nothing more?"

"I did think his clothes a trifle old."

"Excellent. And worn. The fellow is a miser. You saw how taken aback he was when I asked a fee."

"I did indeed."

"I submit, moreover, that he is very probably also a potential thief. There was plaster of Paris also under one of his fingernails. He came here to test his plan. Greed has made a bungler of him. He ought never to have opened the envelope save in the presence of witnesses. We shall hear no more from him."

*26 November 1919*

Our landlady, Mrs. Johnson, tapped rather timidly at our door to-day. When I had opened to her, she excused herself, apologized for her temerity, and addressed herself to Pons.

"Mr. Pons, sir, I wonder if it would be too much if I asked Lillie Morris up to talk to you. What with the new will they found, she's that upset and all."

"What is her trouble, Mrs. Johnson?"

"Why, it's the new will," she said, as if he might have known. "The old will gave everything to her—and the new one nothing. And after she took care of the old man, too!"

"Pray ask her up, Mrs. Johnson," said Pons, his eyes twinkling.

I could not help saying, after our landlady had gone down to her quarters, "More than once, I've had that particular failing called to mind—some woman who gives a decade or more of her life to taking care of an aged father or mother or other relative is done out of her rightful due by another member of the family who shows up from time to time and who sends around little gifts now and then. Old people exaggerate the little differences that invariably develop between them and those who care for them, and fail to realize that it is quite the easiest thing to do them an occasional kindness

without the day to day exchange arising to sully the impression so easily created."

Pons nodded. "That is only another trifle of evidence in support of human frailty."

"Do you know Mrs. Johnson's friend?"

"I have never heard of her before."

Mrs. Johnson presently appeared with Lillie Morris in tow. She was a woman in her early thirties not ill-favoured in looks, with brown eyes at present a bit clouded with trouble. She was neatly but not expensively dressed, and wore her ash-blonde hair attractively piled on to her head. Since she wore no wedding band, I concluded that she was unmarried.

"Pray sit down, Miss Morris, and tell me your trouble," invited Pons.

Miss Morris had brought up her reticule, and this she now put beside the chair on which she sat. Mrs. Johnson took a seat between her friend and the door, and sat leaning forward expectantly, as if at any moment a miracle might be produced by my companion to ease her friend's mind.

"Thank you, Mr. Pons." And what a pleasant, well-modulated voice she had! "Mrs. Johnson said you would be kind enough to listen to me, though I'm sure I am imposing upon you. For the past eleven years I have been living with my grandfather who needed someone to take care of him, and when he died, he left a will leaving his house and what he owned to me."

"A considerable sum or a modest one?" interposed Pons.

"I believe it is considerable, Mr. Pons. But it seems I am not to get it after all. A later will has turned up, and he has left it all to my cousin Percy, with whom he was on friendly terms."

"Percy lived with him?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Pons. Percy lives in Kensington. But he came around now and then and took grandfather out for a day. Mrs. Johnson says I ought to contest the will, and so do some of my other friends."

"You have seen the will, Miss Morris?"

"I was sent a photographic copy of it."

"Ah. Pray let me see it."

Miss Morris took a fat envelope from her reticule and from this took the document in question and passed it to Pons.

He unfolded it and glanced at it. His eyes narrowed. "Why, it is dated less than six months ago," he said.

"My grandfather died two months past," said Miss Morris.

Pons read rapidly through the will. "Each page separately signed, I see."

"Yes, Mr. Pons. I am afraid there is no doubt it is my grandfather's signature. No doubt at all. Even I would have to testify to it."

Pons's eyes, I saw, grew intent as he looked at first one page and then another, until he had finished the fourth page. He lowered the will but continued to hold on to it while he gazed thoughtfully at Miss Morris.

"How old was your grandfather when he died?" he asked.

"He was eighty-seven, Mr. Pons."

"I have no doubt there were differences between you."

"I suppose there were bound to be. Old people are occasionally unreasonable. But nothing very serious, Mr. Pons. Certainly nothing serious enough to bring him to make such a change in his will."

"Your grandfather was in good health?"

"He had been failing for some years, Mr. Pons. No, I shouldn't say he was in good health—or had been in the past three years. He was—well, uncertain on his legs, as one would say."

"Shaky, Miss Morris?"

"Yes, sir. He still got around, but only with difficulty."

"You are mentioned here, Miss Morris—for five hundred pounds."

"I know, Mr. Pons. That was the exact sum my grandfather once mentioned he would leave Percy."

"Indeed. Excuse me, Miss Morris."

Pons got up and went over to that corner of our quarters in which he kept his chemical paraphernalia. He sat down there and carefully scrutinized one page after another of the will Miss Morris had given him, using a magnifying glass, and putting the pages over light, one atop the other. Mrs. Johnson assured Miss Morris *sotto voce*, while they waited, that Pons was a great detective who could unravel any problem at all, but Miss Morris did not seem entirely convinced.

Presently Pons returned to his chair at the fireplace. "There are two courses open to you, Miss Morris. You can contest this will, or you can lay a claim to wages covering the years you took care of your grandfather—unless, of course, he paid you a salary."

"Oh, no, Mr. Pons—short of providing my living, he paid me nothing." Then, uncertainly, she added, "Which would you do, Mr. Pons?"

"Contest, by all means!"

"But how can I do so, Mr. Pons? I *know* that is my grandfather's signature."

"Very well. Let us accept that it *is* indeed Mr. Lemuel Morris's signature. But this will, Miss Morris, is a forgery."

"How can you say so!" cried Miss Morris.

"Each of four pages has been signed in precisely the same way. There is not the slightest deviation among the signatures. One is a precise copy of the other. I submit, Miss Morris, that no man of eighty-seven—and certainly not a man who was shaky—could possibly perform such a feat. I am far from that age myself, and I never to my knowledge indite my name in exactly the same way twice in succession. Nor does Dr. Parker. No, Miss Morris—I rather suspect that your cousin Percy is at the bottom of it. You need only apply to a competent solicitor and lay these facts before him. There are plenty of capable experts who will present the court with all the proof necessary."

Mrs. Johnson beamed, as if her faith in Pons's infallibility had been proved.

3 December 1919

*Pons on Probability.* "Though there are always several possible or probable solutions to every problem, there is only one that will exactly fit all the facts. One proceeds initially to apply the facts to the solution that seems most likely in the circumstances, and then, if they do not fit, to one after another until the correct solution is found.

"If, however, all the probable solutions are eliminated—if none fits all the facts—then whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the correct solution. This was the course invariably followed by the Master. In my opinion, no other course is proper for an investigator.

"Occasionally the police, before they fall back upon this method, seize upon the most likely solution as the correct one, and then attempt to make the facts fit the solution. This has had the happy result of bringing to my attention problems I might not otherwise have encountered."

11 December 1919

When Pons came to the breakfast-table this morning I had the satisfaction of reading a heading in the morning paper to him. " 'Morris Will Case: Percy Morris Charged.' "

"Ah, that young woman took the more sensible course," observed Pons. "I was inclined to think her a little soft—perhaps ready to accept some compromise from her cousin. I am delighted that it is not so."

"Why?" I asked.

"It is a simple matter of seeing justice done, my dear fellow," he replied. "There is a great deal being said today about rehabilitation rather than punishment. I have dealt with the criminal element long enough to know that this idealistic humanitarianism takes rise out of ignorance rather than any well-founded knowledge. Rehabilitation is fine theory, but let us have punishment first."

I could not help observing that my companion sounded like a character from *Alice in Wonderland*.

He ignored me, as he often does. "There is, too, an abundance of prattle about guilt. 'Crime and the criminal are the fault of society,' and it follows to these people who talk in this manner, that 'the criminal is not responsible, society is.' Now, it would be idle to deny that poverty and filth are fertile soil for crime, but it is nothing short of lunacy to suggest that it follows upon this admission that *all* crime rises from such a background, and that all criminals are therefore free of social responsibility. But this ridiculous claim is being made by ever noisier elements of our society. The denial of personal responsibility is fatuous. I do not know a single jurist of my considerable acquaintance who will subscribe to such nonsense."

"You cannot very well rehabilitate a man who has been hanged," I said.

"Ah, well, if he deserved hanging in the first place, there is very little that can be said in favour of trying to rehabilitate him. We are coming dangerously close to a world in which everything is done on behalf of the law-breaker—and at the expense of the law-abiding citizen. That is the road to anarchic chaos. It is the end result of indulgence in idealistic sentimentality, not of rational thought. We have always had the conflict between the individual and society, and the ultimate goal is to protect society by legal means at the least possible loss to the rights of the individual. But as the earth's population increases, it becomes inevitable that the rights of the individual must give way increasingly to the well-being of the social structure as a whole. Yet here we see the beginnings of a movement that goes counter to this inescapable fact—the outcry is

for the protection of the rights of precisely those elements of society who have forfeited their right to demand such protection by anti-social acts. We are reversing Darwin—by insisting that the unfit survive."

I thought him unduly harsh and said as much.

He brushed this aside impatiently. "It is not a matter of harshness or softness. It is simply a failure to see the forest for the trees. Miss Morris's lawyer has certainly taken the correct course. Contesting the forged will meant charging the forger. He should get what is coming to him, though, in view of what happens in our courts all too often, it may be thought infantile to expect adequate justice."

*14 December 1919*

Pons was speaking of the commonplaceness of the average crime this morning when Inspector Jamison paid us a visit.

"I put it to you, Jamison," said Pons, "is it not true that the majority of capital crimes committed in England are utterly without imagination?"

Jamison nodded. "Dull, if I may say so. Very dull. Of course, it's not every crime that has one of these private inquiry agents hanging about to colour it up a bit."

"*Touché!*" cried Pons.

"It's little more most of the time than some bloke breaking in and killing a man in the course of a robbery—or a man killing his wife out of jealousy or something of that kind—open and shut cases. The only trouble we have is in the courts—we know we've got our man, but the lawyers confuse everybody."

Pons smiled. "What problem troubles you today, Jamison?"

"This is just a friendly call," said the Inspector, faintly indignant.

"Not a mystery to be solved in all London?" pressed Pons with a note of disappointment in his voice.

Jamison shook his head. "We've had three murders and one accidental death in the past week."

"All solved, I take it," said Pons dryly.

Jamison hedged a little. "We've got one murderer—and we're onto the other two."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "And the accidental death?"

"Ah, that's a miserable business," said Jamison. "Young woman fell off a train on the London, Brighton, and South Coast Railway on Sunday night."



"I don't recall reading about it in the papers."

"I believe it would make nothing more than a small paragraph on the inside pages," said Jamison.

"I see by your preoccupied air and the way you finger your waistcoat button, Jamison, you're not happy about it."

"She was badly injured, Pons—fractured skull, one leg cut off."

"How old was she?"

"Just twenty-three. I'd have called her a good-looking woman. Angela Morell. A clerk in a dairy in Lavender Hill."

"Go on," urged Pons.

"The body was found in Merstham tunnel. There seems to be no question but that a fall from the train was the cause of her death. None. She couldn't have fallen from any train but the 9:13 P.M. from London Bridge to Brighton, or the 9:33 P.M. to Reading. But both these trains came out of the tunnel with all carriage doors shut. I don't know what kind of feat it would be to fall from a carriage and shut the door behind you. It may not be impossible."

"But it is certainly improbable," conceded Pons.

"Then, too, she had a bit of veil in her mouth."

"Her hat had a veil attached?"

"None."

"Ah," said Pons, his interest quickening.

"Caught on a tooth, in fact."

"A gag."

"Perhaps. But let us say somebody pushed her. Then we come up to the question of why?—and who?"

"I take it she was unmarried."

Jamison nodded.

"You've traced her movements?"

"That's routine, as you know. She left her lodgings at seven that night, saying she was going for only a short walk, and would be back within the hour. But one of her friends said that in the afternoon she had looked through a railway timetable."

"She had an assignation then," suggested Pons. "Was she accustomed to walking out?"

"The landlady said she had two gentlemen friends. But there were nights when she went out alone. She was always back by eleven on such nights. She didn't speak of them to anyone."

"Assuming that she permitted two gentlemen to call for her openly, there must then have been a strong reason why she should

be clandestine with a third—*if* her assignation was with a man."

"Why do you intimate it may not have been?"

"I wonder what manner of man carries a veil about with him. But I am out of touch with the world of fashion."

"No, no, it's true—a woman would be more likely to carry a veil."

"A woman perhaps who had followed her husband to a clandestine meeting with another woman."

"You are certainly colouring it up, Pons," said Jamison.

"Ah, well, if you are content with a verdict of accidental death, there is surely no need to pursue the matter further. I submit, however, that you are anything but satisfied with that verdict. Let us be as objective as we can about the matter. We are given a young woman—not ill-favoured in looks—who is attractive enough to appeal to members of the opposite sex. She goes off to what must certainly be an assignation and is found dead. Very well, then. Eliminating accidental death, we are left with suicide or murder. Had she any patent reason for suicide?"

"We are aware of none."

"Then we come back to murder. Certain limited possibilities are open to us. Though the young woman had been careful to maintain a reputation for good character, we do not have in hand any proof that she was indeed a woman of good character. She could have been conducting a liaison with a married man—and fallen victim either to him or his wife. She could have been a prostitute engaged in blackmailing selected victims, one of whom took this method of disposing of her. She could as easily have been followed by someone violently jealous of her liaison and murdered by him in a rage. Within the boundaries of the known facts we can hardly speculate further without entering the realm of pure imagination. I submit, however, that the fragment of veil found in her mouth suggests a certain premeditation."

"A contrived accident is what you make it, Pons."

"I think it unlikely that it was accidental death," replied Pons. "The fragment of veil caught on her tooth and the closed carriage doors both suggest the presence of some other person in the compartment from which she was thrust. You saw the body?"

"A horrible sight."

"Were there any marks suggesting that her hands and feet had been tied?"

"None."

"Very well, then—she might have been stunned to keep her quiet, and gagged to prevent her crying out if she came to her senses before the tunnel was reached. I take it there was nothing to suggest robbery?"

"She was carrying five pounds and wore two rings—one a diamond, one a ruby."

"On the wages of a dairy clerk?"

Inspector Jamison was disconcerted.

"I put it to you, Jamison, it might be interesting to pursue the inquiry with the conviction that Miss Morell was murdered. Try to ascertain where she got on to the train, whether she was accompanied by anyone, and what her destination was. I rather suspect that the place of the assignation was in a specific compartment on the train, not on the platform, so that her murderer need take no chance of being seen with her."

After Inspector Jamison had gone, Pons said, "I take a dim view of the Yard's finding her murderer. That young woman, if indeed she had been engaged in some criminal activity or a course that would not meet with social approval, seems to have covered herself very well—so well, in fact, that she may defeat all attempts to discover the identity of her murderer. The kind of clandestine affair in which she may have been engaged is commonly extremely difficult to uncover."

*21 December 1919*

I touched Pons on a sensitive point today when I observed that the evidence offered to convict the Moat Farm murderer was almost entirely circumstantial.

"I seem to detect a note of disapproval, Parker," he said with some asperity. "Yet circumstantial evidence is the strongest of all possible evidence."

"As strong as the testimony of eye-witnesses?"

He chuckled dryly. "Stronger! Circumstances cannot lie. They may be misinterpreted, but they cannot lie. Eye-witnesses can, and do—sometimes by design, but usually because they are simply mistaken. I put it to you that no half-dozen eye-witnesses will tell precisely the same story; their accounts are certain to vary. All things being relative, some will see a short man, some a tall one, some a fat one, some a thin man, some brown, some hazel, some blue, some green. But that is not so of circumstances."

"The outcry against circumstantial evidence cannot be that ill-founded," I protested.

"It can and it is. I suspect it was begun by criminals who were fairly caught by circumstances. Wills in *On Principles of Circumstantial Evidence* puts the case well when he says, 'The distinct and specific proving power of circumstantial evidence depends upon its incompatibility with any reasonable hypothesis other than that of the truth of the principal fact in proof of which it is adduced; so that, after the exhaustion of every other mode of solution, we must either conclude that the accused has been guilty of the act imputed, or renounce as illusory the results of consciousness and experience, and such knowledge as we possess of the workings of the human mind.' And Lord Coleridge, summing up in the trial of Dickman, the railway murderer, in 1910, said: 'If we find a variety of circumstances all pointing in the same direction, convincing in proportion to the number and variety of those circumstances and their independence one of another, although each separate piece of evidence, standing by itself, may admit of an innocent interpretation, yet the cumulative effect of such evidence may be overwhelming evidence of guilt.' I recognize no intelligent argument that runs counter to these statements."

"Why, we read interminably of the police trying to convict on evidence that is demolished readily enough by counsel," I said.

"I fear that is only too true. I submit, nevertheless, that you are taking issue with a police action, or the flawed decision of the prosecution. That is a matter of attempting to make of circumstances what they are not. I have no sympathy with it—but it does not bear any relation to the proper interpretation and use of circumstantial evidence."

"But surely you cannot deny that circumstantial evidence takes strength from inference, and that is a matter of opinion."

"It is opinion supported by facts. Indeed, it is opinion rising out of the available facts. I think, if you care to examine the records, you will find that far more wrong convictions have resulted from false and mistaken direct and positive testimony than from the wrong inferences drawn from circumstantial evidence. No one fact is employed alone in the building of a case on circumstantial evidence; no, it is the accumulation of facts that, taken together, related together, are so strong as to establish a clear indication of guilt. Compared to the fallibility of human beings, circumstances invariably present the stronger case."

23 December 1919

Pons's wholehearted respect for time was clearly demonstrated to-day. Having no problem to engage him, he spent the entire day adding to his store of knowledge, which far exceeds my own. He reads reference books, once he had done with the papers—the current issue of *Whitaker's Almanack*—Skeat's *Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*—*A Dictionary of Dates*—Isaac Taylor's *Words and Places*—*Burke's Peerage*—a guide to the cathedrals of France—certainly a hodgepodge of books on a singular variety of subjects.

Seeing me observing him, he smiled and said, "Nothing is as unique as a fact, my dear fellow, and nothing as fascinating. You and I—indeed, the entire universe, depends on facts."

"It is even more fascinating to realize what some people make of facts," I said.

"Is it not!" he agreed, his eyes twinkling.

27 December 1919

A note today from Jamison.

" 'In regard to that Merstham tunnel murder,' " Pons read, interjecting, "Aha! he now clearly calls it 'murder'!—'the woman Morell appears to have been involved with a number of men from her past. New evidence suggests that she has been blackmailing them. A search of her room turned up a small notebook with seventeen names—two of them women. No addresses, but we'll find them. Curious notations under each name indicating payments. Apparently none ever came to her address—she met them by appointment. It will take time, but we'll find him (or her!) eventually. Other than these occasional appointments, her life in Lavender Hill would seem to have been straightforward enough.' " Pons's eyes twinkled as he dropped the note into the coal-scuttle at the fireplace. "I daresay Jamison will have it, in time to come; we coloured it up a bit."

7 January 1920

Mrs. Johnson this morning showed up to our quarters a clergyman who had sent ahead his card announcing himself as the Reverend Howard Foster. He proved to be a lean shank of a man, with a face like a closed rat-trap, very dour and grim. His jaws were clamped together, and his bushy sideboards, now greying, were wiry and stiff. He wore clerical garb, withal a trifle shiny from wear, and

carried an umbrella rolled up under his arm, though the day was fair and rather cold.

He addressed himself forthrightly to Pons. "I am taking the liberty, sir, of bringing to you a small problem which I believe is not one for the police. I understand you have some little knowledge in these matters."

"There are those who say so," admitted Pons.

The Reverend Foster drew from the inner pocket of his long black coat an envelope which he handed to Pons.

"Addressed to a lady," ventured Pons. "And typewritten."

"My niece."

Pons opened the envelope and took out the paper inside. From where I sat, it appeared to be a half page of proof or print. It was ragged along one edge, as if it had been torn from a book.

Pons narrowed his eyes. A kind of gleam came into them. He gazed provocatively at our visitor.

"My niece received this yesterday by post. I was in the study when she opened it. She gazed at it, and I presume she read it. Her face went pale. Then she moaned softly and ran—no, let me amend that, Mr. Pons—she tottered from the room. I ran to her aid, but she thrust me aside. I begged her to tell me what the matter was, but all she did was shake her head and say, 'It's no use. I must go away—far away!' Since then she has hardly come from her room and I have not had a word from her. She walks about like a dead woman. Can you make anything of that? I picked it up when she dropped it, but I cannot make head or tail of it save that it appears to be from a book—not the kind of text that I with my limited time would be likely to read."

"I will need a little time to examine it," said Pons. "I take it your niece has not always lived with you?"

"Only since the death of my wife almost two years ago. She came back unexpectedly from America. She had gone there in 1910 intending to return in a few years, but the war caught her there, and she stayed until it was no longer dangerous to come back. Her father—her last surviving parent, my brother—had died in the meantime; so she naturally came to live with me."

"Ah, she is then no longer a very young woman."

"She is thirty-four."

Pons glanced again at the envelope. "Posted in London. And not far away." He looked up. "I see that you have come up from the country, since the address on the envelope is obviously your home."

Presumably you have other errands in London. If you will return in an hour or two, I believe I may have some explanation of this mysterious communication."

The clergyman moved as if dismissed by his bishop.

He had hardly left our quarters—indeed, his footsteps could still be heard on the stairs—before Pons subjected me to one of those little games he enjoys playing so much. He thrust the page from the envelope at me.

"What do you make of that, Parker?" he asked.

I had only to glance at it to say, "It is clearly a page torn from a book."

"No, no," cried Pons vigorously. "It is clearly a torn page—but not necessarily from a book. Have a closer look at it."

I read it with care—

"Faithless Dick," said Silver. "I've a gauge on the keg of rum, mind, wretch. There's the key; fill a pannikin and bring it up."

Terrified as I was, I could not help thinking to myself that this way Mr. Arrow will have got the strong waters that destroyed him.

Dick was not to come for a while, and during his lengthy absence Israel spoke straight and soft for the cook to hear. I caught but a word or two—"I" and "you," yet I gathered some very important news, that it was certain that not all the crew could be made to join in a mutiny against the captain or yet in any crew of John Silver's, no matter what the circumstances. It made me feel good to hear, and I knew that whatever happened there was still time to stand with valor against Silver.

End of Chapter XI:

What I Heard in the Apple Barrel.

When I looked up, Pons's eyes were keen upon me, and dancing with delight. "Now, then, what do you make of it?"

"It is surely no mystery," I said, sure of myself. "I know the book from which it comes very well—and it is a book."

"Is it, indeed?"

His sharpness ought to have given me pause. "Yes—and you ought to be able to name it as well as I. Wherever else would you find 'Mr. Arrow' and 'John Silver' but in *Treasure Island*?"

"Where else, indeed! Where else but in that miserable revision of the concluding paragraphs of chapter eleven!"

"What do you mean?" I cried. "I remember the scene well. Jim has fallen asleep in the apple barrel, and when he wakes learns for

the first time what a scoundrel Long John Silver is—planning the mutiny and the murder of Squire Trelawney. It is one of my favourite books. That is the way the chapter ends."

"On the contrary," said Pons, with that air I had found so annoying, of being inevitably right. "It ends with the voice of the look-out shouting 'Land-ho!'"

Even as he said it, I knew that it was with these words that the chapter did indeed end.

"Whatever Stevenson was not, he was not a careless stylist, was he, Parker?"

"I should not say so."

"Indeed not. Fancy his having written—I commend the fourth line to your attention—the 'way Mr. Arrow will have got the strong waters that destroyed him.' 'Will have got' indeed! Stevenson would never have been guilty of such a construction."

I conceded the point. "But it is clearly in print," I said, a trifle bewildered now.

"Ah, Parker, I fear you share the common man's reverence for print. He will tell you, 'I saw it in the paper!' as if this were the final bit of proof needed to support whatever contention he may have uttered. 'I saw it in print'—sometimes it is 'cold print,' though all print is by its very nature cold; if it has any warmth it is the author's artistry, not the printer's."

I looked at the page again. "Then," I said, venturing boldly into Pons's domain, "then clearly that construction was necessary to the printer!"

"Capitall Capitall!" cried Pons, clasping his hands together and raising them aloft as in tribute to heaven or to himself—certainly not to me. "You have begun to learn the elements of ratiocination. The printer is not an illiterate, yet he prints such a construction as this. Why?"

Thus emboldened, I ventured again. "The lines contain some message which the woman—Miss Foster—could read."

"That is a trifle elementary, Parker," said Pons, a little more subdued. "I should have thought that anyone so familiar with and fond of *Treasure Island* could have read the message at once. At first glance."

"You flatter me," I said, with an edge of sarcasm I could not withhold.

"Not in the slightest," he said, adding generously, "You do certainly possess the intelligence, you are just not applying it. This is a



simple hidden message—I should not call it a cipher, it is too elementary.”

“I fail to see it.”

“Let us just have a look at a copy of *Treasure Island*.” So saying, he got up and found the book among the jumble on his shelves. He was turning to chapter eleven as he came back to his chair. “Ah, here is the first line. ‘Dick,’ said Silver, ‘I trust you.’”—but this hapless specimen has ‘Faithless Dick’—why?”

“Because ‘faithless’ was necessary to him,” I said firmly.

“Then if that absurd construction in the fourth line was also necessary, and if, obviously, ‘faithless’ must then be the first word of any message this page conveys, the whole should be plain as a pikestaff.”

He got up and put the Stevenson novel away again. Then he came to stand before me, lighting a pipe of the shag he smoked, and watching me struggle with the hidden message the page contained.

“A certain order must necessarily be imposed upon even the crudest concealed message,” said Pons. “In this one it is precisely as mathematical—if not as intricate—as in one of His Majesty’s secret codes. Have a go at it, Parker.”

“I am studying it,” I said.

“Let me point out again that we have two words—‘faithless’ and ‘will’—begin with them.”

“Why must it be ‘will’?” I asked. “Why can it not be ‘will have’?”

“One word at a time, Parker,” said Pons with infinite patience. “‘Faithless’ is the first word, is it not?”

“You have said it must be, and it stands to reason that it is,” I agreed.

“And it is in the first line.”

“Elementary,” I said.

“And ‘will’ is in the fourth line.”

“And it is the fourth word,” I said.

And there for a few moments—long enough to permit Pons to sigh and wonder with evident pity if all my teachers had so difficult a time with me—I stuck, and then, of course, it came to me. I had been searching for something more complex, but the simplicity of it deceived me. With “faithless” as the first word in the first line, and “will” the fourth word in the fourth line, I tried the second word in the second line and the third in the third and had “Faithless wretch

I will" and from there went rapidly down the lines and read it aloud with a shout of triumph.

"Faithless wretch, I will come for you all in good time!"

"I congratulate you, Parker," said Pons. "A trifle slow, but you came through. Now then, who wrote it?"

"You have me there, Pons."

"Do not say so. A printer wrote it."

"I concede that a printer set it, but how do you know he wrote it?"

"Why, because he is an American."

"An American!" I cried. "Pons, you are making sport of me. That is a *non sequitur* if I ever heard one."

"My dear fellow, I try manfully to avoid *non sequiturs*. Would any Englishman have set 'valour' in that American fashion—'valor'? Not on your life. Even if an American had handed the copy in so, he would have spelled it 'valour.' So it follows that the American set it himself."

"With every day that passes, you amaze me more," I said, knowing how it would please him.

He bowed. "With so well grounded a beginning, you will do as well in no time at all."

"To say nothing of so good an instructor," I added.

But at this moment our little game was interrupted by the return of our client, too impatient to remain away for even an hour. I opened the door to his knock.

"Come in, come in, my dear Reverend Foster," cried Pons. "Pray be seated."

"I trust you have some information for me, Mr. Pons," said the clergyman, seating himself in the chair Pons thrust forward.

"I fear I may have some unpleasant news, sir," said Pons, taking his stand with one arm on the mantel. "It depends upon some intelligence you may be able to convey to me."

"If I can," said our client.

"It is about Miss Cordelia. Pray tell me, was she married?"

Our client's face expressed some dismay. "If so, I do not know of it."

"How was she occupied during her years in the United States?"

"She was employed in a printer's and stationer's shop in New York."

"And if not married, engaged in a liaison," said Pons.

The Reverend Foster's face flushed angrily.

Pons gave him no opportunity to speak. "One or the other, and she feared to tell you, knowing your restrictive views. She left the man—husband or lover—and returned to England. We do not know why. She may have had just cause. Now he has followed and found her and he has sent her this message."

"What message?"

"'Faithless wretch, I will come for you all in good time.' It has an ominous sound, sir. By its very nature, it suggests that some sort of bond exists between the sender and your niece. I submit that they were or are married. He means to frighten her and uses a simple code she must have known and apprehended instantly. See there " he took the page from my hands as he spoke, and pointed out the words of the message—"how it is framed. For some reason, they used this code to communicate in earlier years. It may well have been a legitimate reason. I am not prepared to say."

Anger, bewilderment, disbelief—plainly our client was unwilling to entertain the thought that his niece had been involved with a man in any disreputable matter.

"This is, indeed, a matter for the police, Reverend Foster," said Pons quietly. "I suggest you repair to them without delay and ask them to find an American printer not long employed in London, in the area from which this message was posted. He will be a man very likely not over forty, one who cannot resist gloating, vain and perhaps ill-tempered, for only such a one would so taunt and frighten a woman."

Our client folded the page and thrust it back into its envelope, and this in turn he put into his pocket. He got up. "I will need to think of this for a while, Mr. Pons. I had better put it to my niece."

"Do not delay," warned Pons.

"Not such a man as would inspire confidence in a young woman," said Pons reflectively after he had gone. "One confined by a narrow view of the world. That poor woman must carry her burden alone."

*9 January 1920*

I watched Pons today as he read the paper. The process never varies.

He turns first to the political news, scans it briefly, then to news of the international scene. He reads this too, only cursorily.

But any account of a crime enlists his undivided attention. He will sit tugging at the lobe of his left ear, long after he has read the

account, his eyes staring right through the paper. Manifestly, he is turning the problem of the crime over in his mind.

Now and then he makes some comment at random about the "blindness" or the "stupidity" of the police.

More rarely, he commends them, with, "The police are not all fools, thank heaven!"

Having read the paper, he gets the scissors and cuts out any account of a crime that interests him and adds it to his voluminous scrapbook.

The paper is then discarded. He assumes invariably that I have already read it, whether or not it is so.

11 January 1920

A grim-faced Pons greeted me when I came in from my morning round today.

"Have you seen the paper?" he asked.

"I had an early confinement," I answered, shaking my head.

Without a word he passed the paper to me, folded so as to emphasize a few paragraphs under the heading, *Tragedy in Herts*.

"Westmill, Herts," I read. "Miss Cordelia Foster, niece of the Rev. Howard Foster, was seriously wounded last night by a mysterious gun-shot, as she walked across the lawn toward the rectory. Her assailant was concealed behind a hedge that separated the lawn from a small formal garden.

"An American printer, Clarence Farwell, employed by Messrs. Godwin of London, W. 2, is being held. The American claims that Miss Foster is his wife, and that she deserted him. Miss Foster has denied his claim, stating that Mr. Farwell was previously married.

"Inquiries are under way."

"I was afraid that fellow Foster would do nothing," said Pons. "If he put it to her, she very probably denied it, and he accepted her denial at face value because he wished to do so, out of some desire to avoid a challenge to his concept of morality. A foolish man, whose pride has led to this."

14 January 1920

*The Adventure of the Book-seller's Clerk.* Pons called me over to the windows looking down into Praed Street this morning. "What do you make of that fellow?" he asked.

Below, on the kerb, stood an elderly man, clad in a foreign-looking fur cap, and a long coat, with a thick scarf wound around

his neck and hanging out over his coat. Even through the light snow falling, I could see that his shoes were very definitely wet.

"He has been walking for some distance," I said.

"Or some time," amended Pons. "In so light a snowfall it would of necessity be one or the other."

"At the moment he is studying 7B. I suppose he may be a client."

"I should think that likely."

"He looks like a countryman," I ventured.

"I think not," said Pons. "That is not a countryman's garb."

"He seems to be in no hurry."

"True. But at the same time he appears not to have shaved this morning; it is possible that he left home in some agitation."

"But it is almost noon. He couldn't have come directly here," I protested.

"He may be a shopkeeper who had to wait upon his assistant to arrive. Or he may have closed early for the lunch hour. But see, he has decided to come in. We shall hear what he has to say."

In a few moments we heard his heavy tread on the stair, preceded by the lighter footfalls of Mrs. Johnson. And presently he stood on the threshold introducing himself.

"Mr. Pons? My name is Jason Brompton."

"A dealer in second-hand books," said Pons.

"I am, indeed. Perhaps you have been in my shop in the Edgware Road."

"No, Mr. Brompton. The mustiness of old books is unmistakable. Pray sit down and tell me how I can be of assistance to you."

Mr. Brompton came forward and sat down somewhat stiffly near the fireplace where Pons stood with his back to the mantel, his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown.

"Well, sir, it's an old man's fancies, I'm sure, but the fact is I'm troubled about my assistant, Dennis Golders. I very much fear he lives beyond his means—and I don't understand how he can do so. I knew him to be in poor circumstances when he applied for the position, and while I cannot pay him very much—times are difficult, Mr. Pons; one need not buy books, as I am sure you know—he has begun to spend far more on clothes than he earns. They are made for him, Mr. Pons, in Savile Row!"

He said this as if he were speaking of some personage far above his station.

"He may have come into a legacy."

"No, sir. I would certainly know it if he had."

"How long has he been with you?"

"Two years."

"His work is evidently satisfactory."

"Indeed, it is. I have no complaint."

"His accounts are in order?"

"Perfectly. My concern, I assure you, is for his welfare. I cannot rest until I learn how he comes by such means as to make it possible for him to live far beyond the scale even I can afford."

"How did he come to you?"

"He applied with the best references."

"From other book-sellers?"

"Oh, no, sir. He had held various other positions—if I may say so—considerably better than the one for which he made application; but he professed to a love for books—and that is not uncommon in our trade, Mr. Pons, and, since my shop has a good clientele, and has been there for many years—you may have heard of Brompton's—he came with the intention of learning the business."

"Who referred him, Mr. Brompton?" pressed Pons.

"Lord Arthur Savile, for one."

Pons's eyebrows shot up; his eyes began to twinkle. "Indeed!" he said. "Who else?"

"Sir William Joynson-Hicks, H. G. Wells, and Lord Northcliffe."

Pons preserved an almost mask-like face. "I should very much like to see his references, Mr. Brompton."

Mr. Brompton's grizzled face broke into a broad smile. "I rather thought you would, Mr. Pons. I have them here."

He produced four letters from a letter-case in his pocket.

Pons unfolded one after the other and read them. His face remained inscrutable. Presently he looked up.

"Mr. Golders is now at work?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"How many other assistants do you employ, Mr. Brompton?"

"One who comes in the evenings, when I have open hours. And a part-time assistant, when one or the other of us must be away."

"If you can arrange to remain away from the shop for an hour longer this lunch-time, Dr. Parker and I will walk around to Brompton's."

"Oh, that is easily done, Mr. Pons. Mr. Golders—with uncommon thrift—always brings his own lunch, thus giving me a considerable latitude insofar as time is concerned. I have appreciated it."

"And if I may, I will retain these references for the time being."

Mr. Brompton looked a little dubious, but he assented readily enough.

"If you will step around this afternoon, I may possibly be able to satisfy your concern about Mr. Golders," said Pons.

Once Mr. Brompton had taken his leave, Pons began to chuckle. His eyes now positively danced.

"Have you ever before encountered such bedfellows as those gentlemen who gave Mr. Dennis Golders references, Parker?" he asked.

"Well, they are impressive. I don't, though, know Sir William Joynson-Hicks."

Pons's laughter burst forth. "Your indifference to politics causes you to miss some considerable entertainment. That fellow Joynson-Hicks is quite possibly the most jingoistic, egotistic ass who ever brayed in the halls of any government in the world."

"But the others, of course, I know. Indeed, I have a signed *Tono-Bungay*."

Pons sobered once more. "By all means produce it."

"I have it in my trunk," I said, and got up to get it.

It was not without some pride of possession that I laid the book before Pons, open at Wells's signature.

Pons unfolded Wells's letter of reference and laid it beside the autograph in *Tono-Bungay*.

"Identical," I said.

"Let us compare Northcliffe's signature," said Pons. "Any copy of the *Daily Mail* will do."

He found the paper and presently discovered the newspaper magnate's signature—the bold *Northcliffe* on the editorial page.

"They are certainly the same," I admitted.

"And we may assume that Sir William Joynson-Hicks's signature is as genuine," said Pons. "But Lord Arthur Savile's is another matter entirely."

"You are more familiar with the peerage than I," I said. "The name means nothing to me."

"Lord Arthur Savile," said Pons, "is a character in a mediocre short story by Oscar Wilde. I daresay Mr. Dennis Golders is not entirely lacking in a sense of humour."

"And Mr. Brompton is not as familiar with his stock-in-trade as he ought to be."

"Oh, I would not say so. It is just such a name as Mr. Brompton must certainly have heard, but, since it appears in a relatively trivial work of fiction, it is not such a one as he might readily relate

to its source, and, coming upon it as the signature to a letter, might quite conceivably conclude that the writer was a peer of the realm."

"What cheek that fellow Golders must have!"

"If you can forego lunch, Parker, let us just walk around to Brompton's and have a few words with Mr. Golders."

"By all means!" I said.

But Pons was not quite ready. He fancied a disguise. He laboriously affixed sideboards, changed his clothes to rather severe garb, and clapped a pince-nez on a black ribbon to his nose and a bowler to his head.

"You look," I said, "like a private inquiry agent dressed up to resemble a businessman."

"That is close enough," said Pons. "Let us be off."

Mr. Dennis Golders was of rather shorter than average height. He was a blond, well-built young man, alert and bright-eyed. When we entered Brompton's, he did not thrust himself upon us, but permitted us to browse among the shelves and bins of books. There were two other customers in the shop, but these presently bought books and departed.

Only then, seeing that we had not evidently found anything to our liking, did the clerk approach us.

"May I help you, sir?" he asked Pons, since it was plainly Pons who seemed to be in search of something.

"Thank you, I think not," answered Pons crisply.

"You are obviously a bibliophile," said Golders.

"Ah, is it so patent?"

"If I may say so. You must, then, have favourite authors."

"Hardy, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Dickens, Meredith." Pons rattled these names off with a professional air.

"I may have something for you, sir," pursued Golders. "But it will come rather dear."

Pons's eyes narrowed. "Price is no object," he said, though his attitude belied it.

"Let me show it to you."

Golders plunged into the rear of the shop where, reaching behind shelves of books which were separated from the wall of the shop by a counter, he drew forth a book which he handed to Pons.

I saw that it was Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* in fair condition.

Pons glanced at Golders rather than at the book. "A first edition?" he hazarded.

"No, sir. But it will cost four pounds just the same."



"Four pounds!" cried Pons.

"Please open it at the flyleaf, sir."

Pons did so.

Disclosed on the flyleaf was the autograph of Charles Dickens, with a line of greeting and the date.

"Aha!" murmured Pons. "Indeed, I do want this. Four pounds is a trifle dear, as you say—but a signed Dickens!"

He handed the book back to Golders to be wrapped, while he himself took four pound-notes from his pocket and laid them on the counter.

"Do you by any chance have anything more like this?" asked Pons.

There was the barest hesitation in Golders's business-like wrapping of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Then he resumed, as he said, "These items are not commonly come upon, sir. Once in a great while we buy a library with such a treasure among the books, but it is not a frequent occurrence. You might look in again. Of course, some modern authors like Hardy and Conrad are more readily found in signed copies, but Dickens is less readily discovered."

"But this is surely not the only signed book on the premises," persisted Pons.

"We-ell, no, it isn't," admitted Golders.

"Then, if you have another, let me see it," demanded Pons impatiently.

Having completed his parcel, the clerk reached behind the same shelf of books and came out with another.

This time it was H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*, the Newnes edition of 1901. It bore but a simple, undated signature.

"How much?" asked Pons.

Golders seemed visibly to take Pons's measure. "I realize Wells may not be one of your favourites, sir, but there are those who collect him. Two guineas."

Pons paid it with no more than a grimace.

"If you are interested in stopping in from time to time—preferably at this hour, sir," said Golders, as we went out, "I may have other such treasures for you to examine."

"Extraordinary luck!" I said, as we walked along the Edgware Road toward Praed Street. "That you should be able to acquire two such signed books!"

"You did not think it unusual?"

"No. Many such treasures are in fact lost in private libraries. Only the owner knows they are there. Once the owner dies, however, it is another matter, for in many cases his heirs are not aware of everything on the shelves. That is particularly true if the library is a large one. Thus, it is eminently possible for a dealer like Brompton—who buys up entire libraries to keep stock on his shelves—to get hold of such books at a very reasonable price and make a fair profit. Though these did seem to me more dear than the average."

"Well, let us just have a closer look at them when we have them home," said Pons, and would say no more.

Once back in our quarters, Pons compared the signature in the Wells he had bought with that in my *Tono-Bungay*. He scrutinized them under a magnifying glass. I did the same. There was no significant difference between them, save that the one in the book he had just bought seemed to be an older signature in that the letters were slightly larger than the signature in my book, and they had clearly been written with different pens.

"Would you say they were written by the same man?" asked Pons. "I would indeed."

Pons turned next to the Dickens. He examined it thoroughly, from the front matter to the rear of the book. Then he handed it to me with the adjuration, "Pray examine the inside of the front cover, Parker."

"It is blank," I said.

"Say not so. Look again."

I studied it with care. It was somewhat stained, as by age and exposure, and the edges were rubbed.

"Does it not seem to you that an erasure has been made in the upper left corner?" asked Pons.

"The original price seems to have been removed," I said at last, detecting the area of the erasure.

"And what does it seem to you that price was?"

"Two and six."

"Two shillings and sixpence," repeated Pons. "For a book signed by Dickens?"

"Obviously the book was so priced before the signature was discovered," I said.

"It may be so. We shall just wait upon Mr. Brompton to tell us."

So saying, he retired behind the morning newspaper.

Our client returned at two o'clock. He had had his lunch and he was now eager to return to his shop.

"I have been away far too long, Mr. Pons," he said, a little breathless from the exertion of climbing the stairs to our quarters.

"I fancy young Mr. Golders will not take it amiss," said Pons.

"He is a model of propriety," said Brompton. "But I hope you may have something to tell me of his means."

Without a word Pons put before him the signed copy of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Brompton picked it up and turned it round in his hands. "Ah, you bought this in my shop. Two and six. But surely you don't want it. You must let me reimburse you."

"Four pounds," said Pons.

Our client dropped the book as if it had turned to hot coal in his hands. "Not in my shop!" he cried.

"But indeed." Pons bent, picked up the book, and thrust it again at Brompton. "Pray look at the flyleaf."

Brompton did so. His eyes bulged. His mouth fell open. He was manifestly astounded.

His hands trembling, he laid the book carefully down on the table. He took a deep, gulping breath before he spoke.

"Mr. Pons, I had no such book in my shop."

Pons bent again, flipped back the cover, and pointed to the spot where the original price had been erased.

"Look there, Mr. Brompton. The indentation is clear enough. Was that in your hand?"

"It seems to be my script," said Brompton. He leaned back in his chair. "But I cannot understand it. It is seldom indeed that a signed book comes into the shop."

"Do you to your knowledge have any signed books?"

"Well, yes, I have a Machen and a de la Mare. I had a Hardy, but Mr. Golders sold it and at a good price."

"Duly entered?"

"Yes, sir. I know my stock, and the entry was proper."

"You have not had a signed Wells?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Like this?" Pons produced *The First Men in the Moon*.

"That looks like the book I had in stock. Not signed, of course. One and six."

Once again Pons opened the book, revealing the signature.

Our client grew pale, then flushed redly.

"I submit, Mr. Brompton, that if you now return to your shop you will find these sales entered—*Nicholas Nickleby* at two and six, *The First Men in the Moon* at one and six. The difference between those prices and four pounds for the Dickens, and two guineas for the Wells has gone into Mr. Golders's pocket. I submit further that it is by just such sales that Mr. Golders has been able to improve his standard of living over quite some time. Mr. Golders seems to have a considerable knowledge of graphology."

"That is forgery, Mr. Pons. I shall discharge him at once," cried Brompton, coming to his feet, swelling with indignation and purpose.

"Do not be too hasty, Mr. Brompton," said Pons. "Mr. Golders is apparently content to live on but a small measure of illegal gain, and out of some considerable talent and ingenuity."

"I shall give him in charge," said Mr. Brompton angrily. "But first—let me reimburse you." He reached for his pocket.

Pons stayed his hand. "Let me persuade Mr. Golders to reimburse me instead," he said. "When you return to the shop, wrap up a book—any book—and ask Mr. Golders to step around here after work and deliver it."

"If you say so, Mr. Pons. But I cannot continue to employ him."

"Let me just talk to him first."

Mr. Brompton assented, but unwillingly. "I have been taken in—and I cannot undertake to estimate how many of my customers may have been swindled."

He was still muttering angrily when he departed.

"I rather think Mr. Brompton is more angry at having been deceived than at discovering that some of his customers may have been mulcted of small sums," observed Pons.

Late that afternoon, Mr. Dennis Golders knocked.

Pons threw open the door and invited him in. Golders did not immediately see me, and, since Pons had removed his disguise, he did not recognize him.

"I am delivering a book from Brompton's," said he.

"Come in, Mr. Golders, come in," said Pons.

As soon as Golders had taken a few steps into our quarters, Pons closed the door and stood with his back against it.

At the same moment Golders caught sight of me. He started guiltily, but quickly composed himself.

"Those books on the table are yours, are they not, Mr. Golders?" asked Pons.

Golders's eyes dropped to the signed books Pons had left lying out.

"No, sir. They are yours," said Golders, his equanimity restored. "You bought them this afternoon. I recognize your voice now even without sideboards, bowler, and eyeglasses."

Pons chuckled. "Pray sit down, Mr. Golders."

Golders did so, alert but unafraid.

Pons came away from the door. "You have a considerable talent for forgery, Mr. Golders."

"Can you prove it, sir?" asked Golders.

"Yes, yes—if need be, easily," said Pons. "But I am not interested in proving it."

"The return of your money then," said Golders. "And, of course, I will take along the books again."

"I think not," said Pons. "Tell me, Mr. Golders, have you ever thought of turning that remarkable talent of yours to honest accounting?"

Golders looked at Pons calculatingly. "You are sure you have something 'honest' in mind?"

Pons shook his head disapprovingly. "Ah, you are already challenging the honesty of everyone else on the basis of your temporary lack—I say 'temporary' hopefully."

"Is there an honest way?"

"I believe there is—and there may even be occasion in it for such flights of your fancy as the forging of Lord Arthur Savile's signature."

Golders grinned. "And at a decent salary?"

"Quite sufficient for the style to which you have become accustomed, Mr. Golders. Are you willing to try it?"

"I am, sir."

"I have written a note to my brother who is in the Foreign Office. There is a constant need for the services of someone with your uncommon skill in the cryptology department. Take it around there tomorrow, for your place at Brompton's has clearly become untenable."

"There is an alternative?"

"Indeed, yes. Mr. Brompton is ready to give you in charge. And I have these books against that contingency. I trust it will never be necessary to use them. Such skill ought to be put to good use."

Golders began to laugh. "Forging letters and signatures of

diplomats, couriers, intelligence agents, eh?" he said. "I never thought of it. It is still forgery, though, however you look at it. I suppose it all depends upon one's point-of-view, Mr. Pons."

"As does all life, Mr. Golders," said Pons. "Good luck!"

Golders took his leave as jauntily as if he had not a care in the world.

*23 January 1920*

A few days later Pons announced that his brother Bancroft had secured a provisional place in the Intelligence Division of the Admiralty for Dennis Golders, the book-seller's clerk who proved so adept at forging the names of an astonishing variety of gentlemen.

I could not keep from chaffing him a bit, for I had had some reservations about his course of action in regard to Golders.

"Surely that is a kind of rehabilitation," I said.

"I daresay it may be so looked upon," answered Pons.

"Do I not detect a certain inconsistency here?" I asked.

He shot a sharp glance in my direction. "'A foolish consistency,'" he began to quote Emerson, but I interrupted him.

"'. . . is the hobgoblin of little minds.' Yes, I know. But let me quote another eminent authority—'Rehabilitation is fine in theory, but let us have punishment first.' By courtesy of Mr. Solar Pons."

Pons laughed heartily. "I fear you have me there. But does not that depend upon the nature of the crime?"

"You have not said so," I said. "As I recall it, you did not discriminate at all."

"The nature of the crime in the previous instance was a considerable fraud," said Pons. "I am sure that Golders can be prevailed upon to reimburse his victims. But there is a fine point here I rather think you have not taken into consideration."

"In other words," I put in caustically, "when it comes to punishment, there is all the difference in the world between a large fraud and a little one?"

"There is not the slightest difference in fact, but only in degree, and the difference in degree affects only the degree of punishment."

"But Golders is not being punished, as far as I can see."

Pons chuckled. "I had no idea you felt even more strongly than I about this matter," he said. "If it will ease your mind—or your conscience, whichever it is—Bancroft has had some long conversations with Golders. Golders is perfectly willing to reimburse the pur-

chasers of his forgeries out of his salary. But, quite apart from the fact that he cannot remember all of them, there is that fine point you have not considered."

"Pray enlighten me," I said.

"Why, it is simply the attitude of the purchasers. I submit that not one in ten would appreciate being told he did not own, in fact, a signed copy of a book he treasures. Far rather ignorance than repayment! Collectors are a curious lot—and book collectors are in many ways the most curious of them all."

"But what if one of them discovers the fraud and demands his money back from Brompton?"

"Why, then, Brompton will reimburse him—and Golders will reimburse Brompton."

"And as for the others?"

"They have simply paid for the happiness of possessing a forged signature they do not recognize as a forgery. Their lack of knowledge does not in any way affect their happiness in its possession. I know, Parker, in the interests of propriety, you would disillusion them. But to what end? It would not satisfy them, it would in fact leave them, I submit, far more unhappy than they are in their possession of their elaborate forgeries, which, actually, are so well done, as to make each of these books an 'item' in itself in the world of collectors."

"Nevertheless," I said, but subsided into silence, not quite convinced, and feeling obscurely certain that Pons had not given an inch.

"I understand, Parker," said Pons with unaccustomed gentleness. "We would all like our world composed of black and white or right and wrong, but unfortunately matters are not as simple as all that. Would that they were! But if they were, how infernally dull life would be!"

*27 January 1920*

Coming in from attendance on a patient this evening, I found Pons absorbed in his crime files. Cuttings from the newspapers, tear-sheets from magazines and books, and photographs of criminals lay upon and all around the table—a veritable encyclopedia of crime.

As I entered, he glanced at me through the smoke wreathing about him from his pipe. "Ah, I see by your almost fatuous expression that Mr. Simpkins is making a satisfactory recovery," he said.

I acknowledged that my patient was indeed improving and, having divested myself of my greatcoat—for the wind howled outside, and snow was in the air—I went around to look at what engaged his interest at the moment. He held in his hand an account of the death of Edwin Bartlett in Pimlico in 1886, for which his wife Adelaide had been charged with murder—and acquitted.

"Did she do it?" I asked.

"I think it likely. She was enamoured of the Reverend George Dyson, a young minister who was foolish enough to write poems to her—if one could call them poems. Listen to this bit of doggerel—"  
He quoted from the account of the trial at the Old Bailey.

" 'Who is it that hath burst the door  
Unclosed the heart that shut before  
And set her queen-like on its throne  
And made its homage all her own—My Birdie.' "

'My Birdie,' indeed! There are manifestly some unhappy human beings for whom the simulation of love is a disease."

"You are being cynical, Pons," I said.

"The follies committed for the sake of what some people call 'love' are positively incredible," reflected Pons, not without a certain relish. "And the domain of crime offers innumerable examples."

"Well, it is certain that Bartlett could hardly have swallowed a bottle of chloroform without extreme agony—it would have seared its way to his stomach."

"Yet somehow it got there," said Pons. "As one learned medical man remarked after the trial—'Now she's acquitted, she should tell us, in the interests of science, how she did it.' "

He put down the Bartlett account and took up another.

"And no area of human activity so aptly demonstrates the mawkish gullibility and stupidity of the innocent," Pons went on. "As an example, consider the case of Bruneau, the priest, who led a career of crime from the age of thirteen onward and, though caught stealing even in the seminary, was nevertheless ordained in the same year that Edwin Bartlett came to his end, and continued in his career of theft, robbery, fraud, arson, and lechery until it culminated in the murder of his superior, the Abbé Fricot, whom he battered about the head before pushing him into the rectory



garden well to die. He was duly executed at Laval in 1894—but after his burial some pious fools fostered a legend that Fricot had been murdered by a woman caught in theft, who had subsequently confessed her crime to Bruneau and so sealed his lips—a tale so ridiculous and so utterly without foundation that one would have to be somewhat less than a moron to credit it; yet hundreds of people were gullible enough to believe it—people have a positive horror of the obvious—and Bruneau was held to be a saint and a martyr. Indeed, some imbeciles actually brought sick children to Bruneau's grave in the hope that the 'sacred' earth above the body of this murderer, who was without a single redeeming feature, might heal them!"

"Does it give you pleasure to read about these crimes?" I asked. "I have seen you at these files quite often."

Pons raised his eyebrows. "That has the sound of a clinical question, Parker."

"No, no, I am only curious," I protested.

"Let us just say then that I find these accounts instructive."

"In what way?"

"Why, in reaffirming my low opinion of the rationality of the average individual, criminal or otherwise—or my alternatively dim view or high regard for the blundering or, on the other hand, the efficiency of the police—or my admiration for a crime well conceived and well investigated. Will that satisfy your curiosity, clinical or otherwise?"

I assured him that it adequately answered my inquiry.

"Though it is true that the average crime is without imagination," Pons continued, there are those that offer some interesting points. Consider the infinite trouble to which the pathetic Dr. Hawley Crippen went in order to indulge his passion for Ethel Le Neve! This was, incidentally, one of the earliest cases in which Spilsbury shone as medical examiner."

"Was it not also the first case of a British murderer's having been apprehended in America by dint of the police taking a faster boat?"

"No, no, that is a common misconception. It seems to have been the first time that the wireless was used to apprehend a murderer. But Franz Müller, the first known train murderer—he killed Thomas Briggs in a train between Bow and Hackney Wick in the summer of 1864 and threw the body out on to the line—was apprehended as he stepped from the *Victoria* in New York, Tanner, the detective, having taken the faster ship, *City of Manchester*."

He dropped the cutting and picked up a magazine account. "Now here is a classic American case—a miscarriage of justice—that of Lizzie Borden, who was acquitted of murdering her father and stepmother in Fall River, Massachusetts, on a hot day in August, 1892."

"I know the case," I said.

"I find the doggerel written about Lizzie much more to my fancy than that set down by the Reverend Dyson for Adelaide Bartlett—

'Lizzie Borden took an axe,  
And gave her mother forty whacks.  
When she saw what she had done,  
She gave her father forty-one.'

—And much more appropriate, too."

"You have no doubt of her guilt?"

"None. She alone had motive and opportunity. All other theories are the most elaborate fabrications, a testimony rather to the lubricity and wilful imagination of their authors, than to the inescapable facts of the matter. It is another incidence of people refusing to accept the obvious; for some reason they are infected by chronic doubt of what seems to them too simple, too straightforward; they prefer something more devious, more romantically sinister. The lunatic antics of the irrational sceptics in such cases are not without amusement. But enough. I have had my fill of this entertainment for this evening."

As he gathered up the cuttings, he added reflectively, "Still and all, I suppose there is no domain of human behaviour that so well illustrates the complex nature of man as that borderland in which he is impelled toward murder."

# *The Adventure of the Sotheby Salesman*

IT WAS on a warm summer night in mid-August that the curious matter of the Sotheby salesman came to the notice of my friend, Solar Pons. Fortunately, Pons had no problem in hand; he and I had spent the greater part of the day in Soho, moving idly from one place to another. Shortly after eleven o'clock that night we returned to our lodgings in Praed Street and found the telegram which was to introduce us to the mystery at Sotheby.

CAN YOU COME DOWN TO SOTHEBY AT ONCE EXTRAORDINARY  
AFFAIR HAS TAKEN PLACE HERE SOMETHING QUITE IN YOUR LINE  
JEREMY HUDSON

"Sotheby," I said. "Where is it?"

"Just south of Aldershot," answered Pons. "It's only a village, if I'm not mistaken. Can't have more than a thousand inhabitants."

"I don't remember having any acquaintance with Hudson."

"I daresay you haven't. He's an interesting chap; police-inspector at Aldershot. His mind has on more than one occasion struck me as promisingly acute. I'm certain that if he must resort to me, the problem is more than ordinarily interesting." Pons looked at his watch. "We've just time to make the twelve-ten at Victoria."

Within a half hour we were well on our way to Sotheby. Pons was in good spirits, anticipating an interesting puzzle, and he had put me in much the same frame of mind. At Victoria Pons bought a copy of the *Evening News*, and there we found reported what was undoubtedly the matter which had incited Hudson's wire.

## CURIOUS AFFAIR AT SOTHEBY

### *Salesman Dead in Empty House*

The body of Mr. Peter Woodall was found late this afternoon in an empty house on Pearsall Street, the property of Mr. William Hendricks, who lives next door. The dead man was identified as a salesman by several merchants of Sotheby who came to view the body. It was later

ascertained that the late Mr. Woodall was native to Alder-shot, and Police-Inspector Hudson was summoned to take charge of the investigation.

An early examination shows that Mr. Woodall was killed by a rifle shot, and that he had already been dead some time, between eighteen and twenty-two hours, when found. The *News* will report more fully on the matter in later editions.

"Hm!" muttered Pons. "This is the seven o'clock edition of the paper, and the man had been dead between eighteen and twenty-two hours when found late this afternoon. That would put the murder at somewhere around nine o'clock last night."

"It sounds perplexing enough."

"The matter certainly presents interesting aspects," agreed Pons. "The first question which naturally arises concerns the reason for the salesman's presence in an empty house obviously not his own property."

"And who would be sufficiently acquainted with his movements to be on hand to shoot him when he arrived?"

"Well, I daresay speculation is idle. Let us wait until we reach the scene before we search for conclusions."

At the small station of Sotheby we were met by Inspector Hudson in person. He was a tall, heavily built man near middle age, with plain, unattractive features. He wore a slight black moustache on his upper lip. He was obviously glad to see us, for he ran toward Pons with outstretched hand as we stepped from the train.

We were soon comfortably seated in Hudson's car, rattling away toward the scene of the murder, which was, it developed, on the farther side of the village.

"We've seen the first reports of the matter," said Pons, tapping the paper he still carried, "but, of course, we can learn little from them. Has the doctor determined when the man was killed?"

"Yes. It was between nine and ten last night—probably closer to ten."

"Indeed. The paper says he was killed with a rifle. Has the calibre been ascertained?"

"Not definitely, Mr. Pons. The size of the hole in Woodall's head indicates either a .22 or a .25."

"The bullet is lodged in the head, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, perhaps the man was not shot in the house," ventured Pons.

"Some of us have thought he was shot elsewhere and dragged into the building. But I am not inclined to agree with that theory, for I've examined the grounds minutely, and it is definitely certain that Woodall came alone to the house, walked along the side wall, and entered through the back door."

"I take it you went over the footprints?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Besides, there had been rain two nights ago, and the ground under the eaves at the side of the house where Woodall walked was somewhat muddy. Some of this mud can be found adhering to Woodall's boots."

"Excellent, Hudson!" exclaimed Pons, his keen, dark eyes twinkling.

"Yet," continued Hudson, "if the man had not been shot elsewhere—and presumably he had not—I find it difficult to determine why the rifle bullet did not go through his head. . . . But here we are," he added, as the car drew up before a small property fenced off from the street by a row of white staves.

A constable at the gate saluted us as we passed. We walked up a poorly marked path and entered the house through the front door, Hudson pointing out from the windows as we went from one room to another the path taken by the victim in going around to the back door.

As we entered the kitchen, two constables who were standing beside the body directed the light of their torches upon the recumbent form on the floor. The body was that of a middle-aged man, small of build, dressed in shabby clothes. It was difficult to imagine this unprepossessing man—for such he must have been in life—a solicitor of trade. His features were colourless, his hair was thin and sandy, and he had an incipient moustache of the same tinge. He lay almost in the centre of the room, crumpled on his side, his legs twisted beneath him, his arms flung grotesquely outward.

At Inspector Hudson's order a lamp was now lit, for there was no electricity, and the room immediately came to life. It could now be seen that the back door opened directly on the kitchen, for it was standing ajar, and the light from the lamp threw a feeble glow outward and revealed a path of cobblestones leading away from the door. The utterly bare walls of the room were broken only by the door leading into the inner rooms, and a window looking out on the

side of the house. The window, set low in the wall, had been lowered from the top as far as it could go.

The lamp was placed on the floor beside the body, and Pons sank to his knees the better to examine the dead man. He peered intently at the black wound in the dead man's left temple, from which little blood had flowed. Then he examined the dead man's clothes, rummaging through the pockets, but he found nothing save a small penny-box of matches which was two-thirds empty. Having completed this scrutiny, he took up the lamp and, holding it aloft in one hand, crept around and around the body in ever-widening circles. At intervals he placed the lamp on the floor, in order to scrutinize anything that might catch his eye. It was an hour before this process was completed, but at last Pons rose and gave the lamp to one of the constables.

Then he took from his pocket his own torch and vanished into the interior of the house, where we could hear him tramping from room to room. At length he went outside, for we heard the front door open and shut, and presently the light of his torch appeared at the window, where we could see him examining the tracks made by the late Mr. Woodall in approaching the kitchen. At last he himself pushed wider the kitchen door and stepped into the room.

For some moments Pons stood gazing with rapt interest at the lowered window, his eyes slightly narrow now, his lips pushing in and out in his customary fashion when deep in thought. Then he turned abruptly to Hudson and inquired, "Who lives next door on this side?"

"The owner — a Mr. William Hendricks."

"And on the other side?"

"Mr. Jonathan Green, one of the merchants who was able to identify the body."

Pons turned this information over in his mind for a moment without comment. Then he continued, "I understand Hendricks discovered the body late yesterday afternoon. How was it that he came to the house?"

"The same question occurred to me," answered Hudson. "He told us he came to shut the window, which he first then saw to be open."

"Ah, so!" exclaimed Pons. "It was not, of course, usual for this window to be open?"

"No."

"So I thought. I noticed that all the other windows on the ground

floor were securely latched, and it struck me as strange that this one should be open. What do you make of this window's being open, Hudson?"

"Why," said Hudson in some surprise, "I assume Woodall opened it."

"Quite so, Hudson," said Pons. "But surely it is obvious that Woodall was shot immediately upon entering the house? For undoubtedly you have seen that the salesman, upon coming into the kitchen, struck a match and that, by the light of this match, the murderer shot him down?"

Hudson sprang forward with an exclamation. Pons extended a match, burned a good two-thirds of the way from the head, which he had evidently found on the floor during his previous examination.

"You intimate that someone waited for Woodall?" asked Hudson in some trepidation.

"Precisely. The fact is self-evident. Someone came to this house and opened the window; this was certainly not Woodall, for he was unfamiliar with the house. Therefore, whoever opened that window knew that Woodall was to come here tonight. . . ."

Pons stopped suddenly, still looking intently at the open window, then clapped one hand to his head, and ran swiftly out of the open back door, to the amazement of Inspector Hudson and the constables. In a few moments it was possible to determine Pons's whereabouts, for there came through the window a flash of light behind a hedge some distance from the house. This vanished after five minutes, and there now occurred an interval of fully a quarter of an hour, at the expiration of which Pons suddenly appeared in the open doorway.

"Singular!" he muttered, coming into the room. "Most singular." He flashed a glance at Hudson. "I understand that Woodall was an inhabitant of Aldershot. Do I understand that he made his home there?"

"He didn't have a home of his own, Mr. Pons. But he certainly spent his free time there, staying at a second-rate hotel, The Antler Inn."

"You are aware of no enemies he might have had?"

"Entirely unaware of any. Woodall was a meek, timid man, not likely to arouse enmity. It is always the strong man who has enemies, seldom the weak."

"True," assented Pons. "But surely this must have blocked your search for a motive?"

"The murder seems marked by an entire absence of motive," admitted Hudson. "But if you've discovered anything," he continued, looking sharply at Pons, "I should be glad if you could suggest it to me."

"I think it quite possible to say that the murderer was concealed behind a hedge dividing this property from that of its owner, Mr. Hendricks. It is obvious that he waited there for some time—over an hour, I should say. The distance from here to the hiding-place is roughly about fifty yards; I think you'll find upon investigation that a bullet from a .25 calibre rifle will not go through a man's head at fifty yards. While he waited, the murderer dropped a fragment of a note."

Pons took from his pocket a small, triangular scrap of paper, which he spread on his palm for Hudson to see.

"You will observe," Pons went on, "that the piece is so torn as to give us three words—the first word, *he*, on the topmost line of this scrap, and two words on a following line, *nine* and *ten*, from which the connective has been torn, but I daresay we would be quite safe in assuming the missing word to be *and*. Then, below, we have the first letter of a signature, the letter *J*. I give you that for what it is worth to you, Hudson; for the present I should like to retain the scrap. Also, I would commend to your attention the clothes of the late Mr. Woodall, and the articles found in them."

"But there were no articles found—only a box of matches."

"That is what I would draw to your notice." Pons turned and looked from the window, where in the grey of the sky white rifts were coming. "Dawn is breaking, Hudson, and I would like to have a few words with Mr. Jonathan Green. I daresay it can be arranged."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons." Hudson turned to one of the constables and instructed him to go to Green's house and rouse him.

It was becoming rapidly lighter as we left the empty house and walked slowly down the path. In the street Pons spoke again.

"You will note that these three houses—Hendricks's two, and Green's—are fenced in as one property, though hedges divide them."

"Yes," replied Hudson, "I understand that Green bought his house from Hendricks, who built all three. They are similar in structure, too."

We entered Green's property. Just beyond the gate Pons stopped and indicated a short triangular series of footprints leading from the gate and back to it again.



"Let me call to your notice that Woodall first entered here and ventured some distance before discovering his error and retracing his steps."

"The man made a mistake anyone might have made."

"Quite so. But recall the note. One does not appoint a rendezvous at a place with which one of the parties is not familiar. Especially is this true when the rendezvous has been made for night."

"You think there was a rendezvous, then?"

"Surely it is not a coincidence that the fragment of note should mention the hours of nine and ten, between which the doctor has given his opinion that Woodall was killed?"

"But who would write to Woodall?" asked Hudson in perplexity. "Since you put it that way, you certainly bring forward a new aspect. Unless I've been greatly deceived by Woodall's appearance, I find it difficult to concede that anyone might write him to appoint a rendezvous, obviously meant to be secret."

"A good, pertinent question, Hudson. Who would write Woodall?" He paused and looked intently at Hudson with a twinkle in his eye. "Who would write to a common salesman, and sit patiently waiting to dispose of him—a man who had not an enemy in the world?"

"The problem grows more and more puzzling."

"Indeed, Hudson. Where are your wits?" exclaimed Pons in mild irritation. "After all, the note was not found on Woodall's body."

"Someone might have taken it."

Pons shook his head impatiently. "The soft ground shows you that no one approached the deserted house until Hendricks came to examine into the matter of the open window. Besides, the note had been near the hedge since the night of the murder. Now, Hudson, I leave you to ponder over these things; here we are at the home of Mr. Green and, if I am not in error, there is our man in that small room just ahead."

Jonathan Green was a rather handsome man about forty years of age. Slightly built, clothed in a dark blue dressing-gown, he presented a good appearance as he stood waiting for us in his small library.

"We're sorry to rouse you up so early, Mr. Green," said Hudson, "but Mr. Pons here, who is looking into the matter next door, wished to have a few words with you."

"Quite all right," said Green in a mild, pleasant tone of voice. "I'm ready to answer any question you may care to ask."

Pons thanked him with a nod. "Forgive me if I come directly to the matter in hand. In regard to the occurrence next door, it rather surprised me that no one had made mention of hearing the shot that killed the poor fellow. Did you, by any chance, hear a shot between nine and ten o'clock on the night of the crime?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you get up to look about?"

"No."

"Are shots then so common in this part of the country?"

"In a way, yes," replied Green, smiling at Pons's surprise. "You understand, Mr. Pons, we are at one end of the village out here, and it's not unusual for rabbits from the neighbouring woodlands to come prowling about our small gardens at night. Mr. Hendricks has been especially bothered with the pests—they have been eating his vegetables—and he has got into the habit of rising at night to shoot them. I myself occasionally take a shot at them. The neighbourhood would not be startled by a shot or two before midnight."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, ever since last spring."

"I think we may take it for granted that whoever shot Woodall knew of that," I put in.

Pons assented shortly and turned again to Green. "Might I ask you what you were doing on the night of the murder, Mr. Green?"

"Certainly," answered Green readily. "I was preparing to go out, but I changed my mind and remained at home."

"Was that after the shot?" put in Hudson eagerly.

Green regarded Hudson inscrutably for a moment before he replied, "Yes, after the shot."

"May I ask where you had intended going?" inquired Pons.

"I'd rather not say," returned Green, colouring a little. "Of course if you must know. . . ."

Pons waved the question good-naturedly aside. "You're not a married man, I see," he said, chuckling.

"No, I'm not," Green admitted. "But it's not my fault."

There was general laughter, only Pons retaining his composure. Pons now produced a pen and paper and extended them to Green.

"Just as a matter of course," he explained, "will you write down

and sign a statement that you heard a shot between nine and ten on the night of the crime?"

"Certainly," said Green. He took the paper and pen, and retired to a small desk nearby, where he sat and wrote out the desired statement. He turned and read what he had written: "I hereby depose that I heard a shot between nine and ten o'clock on the night of 17 August." He looked up. "Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite," said Pons, and gravely took the extended paper, folded it, and slipped it into his pocket. "I think that will be all, Mr. Green. Thank you for bearing with us."

On the street once more, Pons turned to Hudson. "Now I should like to ask a few questions of Mr. Hendricks."

Hudson nodded. "He must be up by this time. If not, we'll have no difficulty in rousing him."

Pons nodded absently.

"By the way, Mr. Pons," Hudson broke in, "if I might ask, why did you want Green to write out a statement?"

"I thought that quite obvious, Hudson," replied Pons. "You'll note that the statement contains both the words *nine* and *ten*. A brief glance at the fragment of note found behind the hedge has already assured me that its writer and Mr. Jonathan Green are one and the same. The writing is marked by the Roman *e*; the *J* of the signature is precisely the same; there is the identical pronounced upward slant—all in all, there is only a very slight difference between the two writings."

Hudson pondered this briefly before he protested, "But if Green wrote that note, he can't be our man, for the note could not have been written to himself."

"Certainly not. But you forget that, as you yourself proposed, the murderer might have recovered the note in some fashion. Also, you might have noticed on the wall of Green's library just such a weapon as killed Woodall—a .25 calibre rifle."

Hudson gave vent to an exclamation, and slowed his pace perceptibly.

"And to top that, my dear Hudson, it is quite possible that some painful business details between the late Woodall and Mr. Green supplied the motive for this apparently so perplexing puzzle. It would be interesting to build up a hypothetical case along those lines."

"Striking!" murmured Hudson. "I never considered that angle."

"Obviously," said Pons dryly. "Nor would I suggest that you give much thought to it now."

Inspector Hudson turned a chagrined face to me.

"However," continued Pons imperturbably, "if you're determined to get ahead with your investigation, I would advise that you return to Mr. Green and discover just where he was going the night of the murder."

"You think that important?"

"Extremely so. Indeed, perhaps it is most important. Has it not occurred to you that Green might have been on his way to visit the person to whom he had addressed his note?" Pons waved Hudson away. "Don't think of us, Hudson. We'll find Hendricks easily enough. Do you go ahead and do as you please—question Green; find out where he was going. Don't be too harsh with him."

"You think it will be necessary to be harsh with him?" asked Hudson dubiously.

"Perhaps. In any case, I venture to predict that Mr. Green will prove remarkably reticent about where he had intended going between the hours of nine and ten on the night of the murder—despite his show of good-natured willingness to tell us a few minutes ago."

"I'll go back," said Hudson with determination.

"Follow us to Hendricks's as soon as you can."

Hudson turned and walked rapidly back along the street, while Pons and I turned in at the third of the houses that were so alike. Our coming had not been unobserved, for no sooner had we closed the gate behind us than a tall, striking figure, dressed in shooting clothes, came striding around a corner of the house and bore rapidly down on us. As he came on, I observed that his face was marked by small sharp eyes beneath bristling brows, a full sensuous mouth, and a dark, heavy moustache. He came to a halt ten feet away and glowered at us suspiciously.

"Mr. Hendricks, I presume," ventured Pons.

The fellow nodded.

"I'm looking into the matter next door and there are a few questions I would like to ask you. I am Solar Pons, and this gentleman is my friend, Dr. Parker."

"Why, certainly," responded Hendricks, softening at once. "Will you come into the house?"

Without waiting for an answer, he turned on his heel and strode rapidly toward the house, Pons and I trailing him. In a few moments we were comfortably seated in Hendricks's den, a replica of Green's library, differing in that where Green displayed books, Hendricks had filled the room with trophies of the chase.

"Now, Mr. Pons, I'll answer anything you ask if it bears on this matter," said Hendricks.

"I want to know first whether you heard the shot that killed Woodall?"

"I can't say for certain, of course," answered Hendricks slowly, "but I think I did. At least, I heard a shot between nine and ten o'clock on the night the fellow was killed."

"You didn't investigate?"

"It's common for some of us to rise at night and shoot rabbits grubbing in our gardens. I have the habit; so has my neighbour, Green. I thought Green was protecting his garden when I heard the shot."

Pons reflected for a moment, Hendricks watching him closely. "I should like to know your reaction on discovering Woodall's body."

"Naturally, I was very much surprised," replied Hendricks without a trace of emotion. "I knew Woodall slightly, of course, but not enough to speak to. I notified the police at once."

"What did you think when you saw the body?"

"Well, I didn't think it was a case of murder; I thought the poor fellow had made away with himself—I understand he'd not been in sound condition financially—but the absence of the weapon left no alternative but that murder had been done."

"Precisely," agreed Pons. He allowed his gaze to linger on Hendricks's new shooting boots. "One more thing—I am told you went over to the house to close the kitchen window; you did not close it. Why?"

Hendricks shrugged his shoulders. "Purely an oversight, I suppose. In the excitement of the discovery, I naturally overlooked it; later on, I realized that it was the best thing I could have done, for it left the scene just as I found it."

"The windows were always kept locked, then. Were the doors also kept locked?"

Hendricks leaned eagerly forward. "There you have it, Mr. Pons. Those doors were always locked. Yet, Woodall didn't break in the back door—so it must have been open when he got there. Question is, who opened it?"

"Who has the key?"

"It's kept in a drawer in my room."

"The drawer is kept locked?"

"No."

"So that anyone in the house had access to it?"

"Yes, but there are only three of us. My wife, my man, and myself."

"Very good, Mr. Hendricks. I should like to speak to your wife."

"Very well," answered Hendricks and left the room to get her.

Mrs. Hendricks was a slight woman, somewhat younger than her husband, and singularly attractive. My first impression, which I felt Pons shared, was that Mrs. Hendricks had been weeping; for this seemed evident, despite the patent efforts she had made to disguise the fact. She greeted us in a light voice, which impressed me favourably.

Before Pons could begin to question her, there was a sharp rapping at the front door, and Hendricks departed to answer it. As he left the room, I noticed that his wife followed him with her eyes—and I was struck with her gaze, for it was venomous with hatred.

"Mrs. Hendricks," Pons spoke quickly, "do you realize that you have unintentionally caused the death of a man?"

"What do you mean?" she asked breathlessly, her face paling so that the artificial colour flamed on her cheeks.

"You unlocked the back door of the empty house so that someone could keep an appointment with you," began Pons, only to be interrupted by the woman.

She sprang up in uncontrollable agitation and came over to Pons. She put her hand on his arm, and looked at him, wide-eyed. "How much do you know?" she demanded.

"Everything," answered Pons, looking sternly at her.

For a moment there was silence. She swayed a little, and I thought briefly that she might faint, but she did not. "My God!" she breathed. "Surely you can't blame me?" She stepped back. Then, with an abrupt gesture, she allowed her kimono to slip down over her shoulder, exposing her skin, upon which were ugly, dark welts.

There was an exclamation from Pons. I felt a sudden wave of pity for Mrs. Hendricks.

"I have to live with him," she said passionately. "I hate him—he beats me." She stopped and looked at Pons steadily for a moment, struggling to regain her composure. "You know all—about the note?"

"Yes," said Pons in a low voice, for we could hear the footsteps of Hendricks and Hudson approaching along the passage.

"I lost it," she went on hurriedly. "I know *he* found it. And his temper—I knew that might happen. But I called Jon in time!" She stopped and hastily rearranged her kimono.

"I think that will be all," said Pons kindly, as the two men entered the room. "Please return to your room, Mrs. Hendricks."

The woman got up obediently and, without a glance at her husband, who had shot a quick, suspicious look at her, left the room. Pons turned to Inspector Hudson.

"Well?" he asked. "Did Green tell you?"

Hudson shook his head glumly. "Not a word. And got quite angry, too."

Pons smiled. "But I shall have something of interest for you soon, Hudson. Will you be so good as to call two of your constables?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons." He was as surprised as I at Pons's request, and he could not help betraying his perplexity as he left the room to call the constables from the empty house next door.

"I hope you're getting on, Mr. Pons," said Hendricks. "This business is awkward for me."

"I shall have the matter cleared up before long," answered Pons.

At this moment Hudson and his two men entered.

"Ah, Hudson," murmured Pons. "Please step forward. You may arrest Mr. Hendricks and charge him with the wilful murder of Mr. Woodall the night before last."

There was a hoarse bellow of rage from Hendricks, but the constables were upon him before he could reach Pons, and in a few moments he was securely manacled between them.

"It would be well if we removed from Mr. Hendricks that part of the evidence he has not destroyed," continued Pons, as if nothing had taken place. "Some inconvenience will no doubt be caused, but in the circumstances it would be better to remove the prisoner's right boot, on the sole of which you will find a fragment of flint pressed into the hard leather; comparison with the print beside the hedge will prove that it was made with this boot."

Only after Hendricks was taken away did Pons consent to expound the case to Hudson, who came bristling with questions to take us back to the station.

"Let us start at the beginning," began Pons. "You will remember, I called your attention to the articles found in the dead man's pockets, and to his clothes?"

Hudson nodded.

"Very good. I did so because it was perfectly obvious that his entire lack of the smallest necessities, his threadbare clothing, supplied the answer to the primary question of why Woodall was in the







empty house. He was there for shelter; having no means and a little pride, perhaps lacking friends and, knowing this for an empty house, he planned to spend the night here. He entered as we know by way of the back door. In the kitchen he struck a match to look around him and was shot down by a good marksman at fifty yards—from the hedge next his home.

"Since the purpose of the salesman in coming to the house must certainly have been kept secret, it follows then that the note written by Mr. Green, a fragment of which we found near the hedge, where Hendricks carelessly dropped it, could not possibly have been addressed to Woodall. After our conversation with Green, I was satisfied that he had not written a note to lure someone to the house to be killed, as at first it appeared. Instead, a new element entered into the matter. I had now to determine who opened the back door and the kitchen window. The key to the door was kept in Hendricks's drawer, where he, his wife, or his man had access to it.

"Thus, by simple elimination, it became evident that Mrs. Hendricks had opened the door; therefore, it followed that Green's note had been addressed to her, for surely Green was not arranging a tryst with Hendricks or his man. In turn, it follows that there was something between Mrs. Hendricks and Mr. Green. However, if Mrs. Hendricks had, on receiving Green's note appointing the empty house as a safe place to meet—I daresay they had met there before—gone over and unlocked the back door, so that Green could enter and wait for her, surely she did not open the kitchen window, for this would have attracted her husband's attention.

"It was evident that, owing to the habits of Mr. Hendricks—you remember the *he* of the note, a pronoun I take to refer to Hendricks—no definite hour of meeting could be appointed; hence the rendezvous was made for some time between nine and ten o'clock that night. Now, if neither Mrs. Hendricks nor Woodall opened that window, who did? Could it be anyone but the man who intended to take his chance shooting through it without breaking the pane? Hardly, I daresay. This man was Hendricks, for he had found the note Mrs. Hendricks lost, and in his jealous fury, he determined to put Green definitely out of the way.

"But he failed to reckon on his wife who, when she missed the note, called Green to warn him away. Hendricks, knowing nothing of this, concealed himself behind his hedge, and, when he saw a figure enter the grounds and pass into the house, he prepared to

shoot. And at the moment when Woodall struck a match to look about him at the place he had chosen to spend the night in, Hendricks fired and killed him. That is all there is to the matter."

Pons paused briefly before he added, "By the way, Hudson, if you want to do me a favour, let me suggest that you keep the relations of Mrs. Hendricks and Green as much out of the picture as possible."

To this Hudson unhesitatingly agreed.

There was an epilogue to this curious affair. Hudson was as good as his word, for there was no mention of Mrs. Hendricks and Green in the prosecution, and much trouble was saved by Hendricks's confession, for he made no mention of his motive in killing the salesman.

A year after the execution of Hendricks, Pons received in the mail a cutting telling briefly of the wedding of Mr. Jonathan Green and the widow of the late Mr. William Hendricks. There was no signature, nor any indication of who might have sent it, but Pons never had a doubt of the sender. Nor had I.

## *The Adventure of Ricoletti of the Clubfoot*

IT WAS on a wild and windy night in autumn of a year shortly after my fortunate chance encounter with Solar Pons led to our sharing quarters at 7B, Praed Street, that Pons was introduced to the curious affair of Orso Ricoletti, the reclusive cryptographer. I had fought my way home from a professional call through a driving rain which came down in sheets of such intensity that the street-lamps shone through only as indistinct blurs of light. Few vehicles were abroad, and even fewer pedestrians. Yet, when I reached our quarters at last, grateful to be shut away from the equinoctial gale outside, I found Solar Pons standing on the hearth in an attitude of the keenest expectation. He was clad in his blue dressing-gown and wore slippers, and stood with his hands clasped behind him; that he had been smoking shag was evident in the pungency which lingered in the room. His almost feral face with its sharp features—the aquiline nose, the piercing grey eyes, the thin-lipped mouth, and the heavy brows—was bent upon the door as if he expected it to open at any moment and present to him the agent of another perplexing adventure.

"Aha, Pons!" I cried, "you were anticipating someone else!"

"Say rather I am," he replied, a smile touching his lips. "I could hardly mistake that familiar tread of yours for anyone else's."

"It is not fit for beasts outside, to say nothing of men," I said, shrugging out of my raincoat. "Who but a doctor would be out on a night like this?"

"Or a policeman," added Pons, with a dry chuckle. "I daresay you have heard me speak of my brother, Bancroft?"

"It is he who is in the Foreign Office?"

"Yes, he holds a position which is apparently as important as its nature is ambiguous. He is about to honour our humble dwelling with his presence. Since he is devoted above all else to his physical comfort, it requires no great intelligence to divine that only a matter of marked significance would bring him out on such a night. From there it is but a step to the conclusion that the matter is at least quasi-official, for no personal concern would move Bancroft sufficiently to venture against such weather. I confess I anticipate

his arrival; I have spent a dull day adding to the scrapbooks, and puzzles on paper have no such attraction as the problem in life."

Even as he spoke, the door to the sitting-room opened noiselessly and disclosed a tall, heavy, almost massive man, who might in physical appearance have been an inflated replica of my companion, save that his eyes were rather sleepy in their expression than keen, like Solar Pons's, and his mouth was proud and sensuous; withal, he was an impressive figure of a man as he stood for a moment on the threshold before coming forward without sound, lightly, into the sitting-room.

"At your favourite pastime, eh, Solar?" he murmured with amused tolerance.

He crossed the room and appropriated Pons's own chair, letting himself down into it and promptly sprawling at his ease, stretching his legs toward the hearth. He moved with remarkable grace for so large a man.

"I fancy I am not wide of the mark," said Pons. "I believe you have not met my companion, Dr. Lyndon Parker. My brother, Bancroft."

Bancroft gazed languidly in my direction, but his air of the casual did not conceal the alertness behind. "A medical man. Back from an obstetrical case within the hour, I see. Your cuffs are still wet with rain. And babies carry with them a singularly lingering aroma, I have often observed, Solar."

"I have never been aware of it," I said.

"Of course not. You exist in these auras, doctor; one would not expect you to be aware of them. My brother, however, delights in these little conclusions which are so effective because they are devoid of the simple intermediate steps. The average listener never fails to be impressed at his deductions because he is himself too slack-witted to follow the peregrinations of my brother's nimble thoughts. If I were to tell you, furthermore, that you had just delivered a nine-pound boy to a dark-haired woman in her late thirties in a comparatively easy delivery, which you had expected to be difficult, you would no doubt be amazed."

"I would indeed," I said in astonishment.

"Yet it is perfectly simple," continued Bancroft, with a twinkle in his blue eyes. "For the delivery was made to the wife of one of our officials in the consular service and a report of it duly reached our office just before I set out for these quarters. That, I submit, is

evidence of the triumph of instruction over deduction, but my brother would go through a comprehensive recital of each little clue—the long dark hair adhering to your trousers, the contented satisfaction so evident on your features, and so on—until he had reduced the whole to such patent absurdity that you could not help being disappointed in yourself for having failed to draw similar conclusions and thus, of necessity, angry at Solar for having so underscored your manifest shortcomings.”

“I can hardly believe you came through wind and rain to instruct Parker,” said Pons.

“No, I did not,” agreed Bancroft amiably. “I came on a very different mission indeed.” As he spoke, he took out a gold watch and consulted it gravely. “I am sorry to disturb your comfort, but I must take you out in this weather; I fear there is no alternative. I want you to see Ricoletti.”

“Is he unable to come here?” inquired Pons.

“Ah, forgive me. I should have said ‘view.’ He will not know you are seeing him. He is in our cryptography department at the Foreign Office, and I have arranged matters so that he will be leaving his office within a quarter of an hour. I have a cab downstairs; if you hurry, we can just make it.”

“Pray do not expect me to recount his life history from the brief glance we will have of him running through wind and rain to his car,” said Pons, stepping from his bedroom slippers.

“You will have ample time to view him, weather or no,” retorted Bancroft imperturbably.

In a few minutes we were on our way to Whitehall. We drove in silence, Bancroft with his chin resting on his hands, folded over his cane, his eyes dwelling on the street before our cab, Solar Pons in the familiar attitude of contemplation, his chin sunk upon his chest, his deerstalker drawn down over his eyes.

Bancroft Pons had given the driver detailed instructions and in a short while the cab drew up opposite the Foreign Office building in Parliament Street. Lights still burned in the building, despite the lateness of the hour, for it was now nine o’clock by the booming of Big Ben, the notes loud in the wet, windy night. The rain was abating, though the wind blew as violently as ever. Three or four cars were parked in the vicinity, one of them directly before the Foreign Office building, with a driver sitting at the wheel.

“That is his car,” whispered Bancroft. Peering up at the

building, he added, "There. His light has gone out. He will be along in a few moments, and you will have an excellent opportunity to see him when he crosses to his car; there is adequate light there."

We sat waiting silently for a few moments more. Then Bancroft touched his brother's arm and murmured, "Ricoletti."

"Ah," said Pons, "a deformity of the right pedal extremity. A clubfoot!"

A short, thin, sallow-faced man came from the building and made his way under the brilliant street-lamps toward the kerb. He moved with almost agonizing slowness, aided by a cane, buffeted by the wind, and impeded by a heavy briefcase he carried, dragging himself across the pavement with patent effort.

"A native Briton," said Pons.

"Born in London in 1868 of Italian parents," said Bancroft.

"He has been in foreign service."

"Consular. In the West Indies."

"How long ago?"

"Eleven years. He is now fifty-three."

"There is obviously no question of his loyalty."

"None," assented Bancroft.

"Very well, then," said Pons. "He is a conscientious, able servant of His Majesty's Government. He is sufficiently moneyed to enable him to own a Daimler and support a chauffeur, as well as, presumably, a house in the suburbs."

"Hampstead. He lives on the edge of the Heath in relative seclusion."

"Nevertheless, the Foreign Office has uncovered some reason for concern and, since you have stirred yourself to inquire into it, Bancroft, I have no doubt there is a valid basis for such inquiry."

"My dear Solar, you are unusually verbose. Come."

The Daimler had driven off with the deformed Ricoletti; it was out of sight beyond the corner of the street when we left the car and crossed to enter the Foreign Office building, where Bancroft was instantly recognized by the guards there, and we were passed through. He led the way to the lift and we were taken up several flights before we debouched upon one of the floors above. Bancroft went directly to a front office, which he opened by the use of three different passkeys, to reveal an austere little room, brilliantly lit at the touch of a button.

The room was devoid of everything but the steel desk, a filing cabinet, three chairs, and a wall shelf of apparatus clearly designed

to be of use in the research which Ricoletti did for his government. A wastepaper-basket stood beneath the opening of the desk.

"Spare to austerity," murmured Pons. "Mr. Ricoletti is not given to ostentation nor is he a slave to the comforts of the flesh."

"He lives like a Spartan," agreed Bancroft. "But we will return to him later. Pray consider the room. How readily do you believe it might be entered?"

"It would not be easy," said Pons. He strode to the single window it contained and looked down. "The window is all but impossible. The door has a triple lock. The desk has a similar sequence of locks."

"Yet it was entered last night. And Ricoletti's desk was opened. Only a purely fortuitous circumstance revealed that fact to us, for nothing whatever was taken and there was subsequently no evidence of the slightest disturbance."

"Except in the Foreign Office," said Pons dryly.

"The affair reflects no credit upon our operations," admitted Bancroft with a grimace. "Yet there is no occasion for any alarm. It is true, up to three days ago Ricoletti was at work on the deciphering of a new code recently put in use by the Japanese War Office, as well as at the construction of a new code for the Admiralty. Both might have been of interest to someone outside, particularly the Admiralty code. But all work on the Admiralty code was stopped three days ago, and all papers removed from Ricoletti's office, and he had decoded the Japanese cipher two days past. So there were no papers of serious moment to be had in his desk last night."

"What was the incident which caused the Admiralty code to be withdrawn from Ricoletti?" asked Pons shrewdly.

Bancroft smiled. "Elementary, my dear Solar. I shall come to that in good time. Let us first consider the incident of last night. Entrance was effected between two and three o'clock in the morning. The single guard was summoned to the street by a diversion—a woman's cry for help. He was certainly not away from his post for more than two minutes. Yet in that time someone entered the building and Ricoletti's office. The guard presently suspected that something might have been designed to take him from his post, and he began a systematic search of the building.

"When he came to Ricoletti's room, he flashed his light cursorily across the desk. He swears that he saw sitting there a horrible beast with long black hair and a bulbous, warty face, so terrible of aspect that he stumbled backward, his torch fell or was knocked from his



hand, and in his shocked confusion, he was struck a blow on the temple which temporarily knocked him out. He says that his light disclosed papers on the desk, but when he came to and put on the overhead lamp, all was in order in the room. There was nothing whatever to indicate that anyone had been here since Ricoletti left. Of course, he reported the matter at once. We were over here within the hour; we went through the room and Ricoletti's papers with the greatest diligence. We made one disturbing discovery, and that, too, was in the realm of the conjectural, as was the guard's experience."

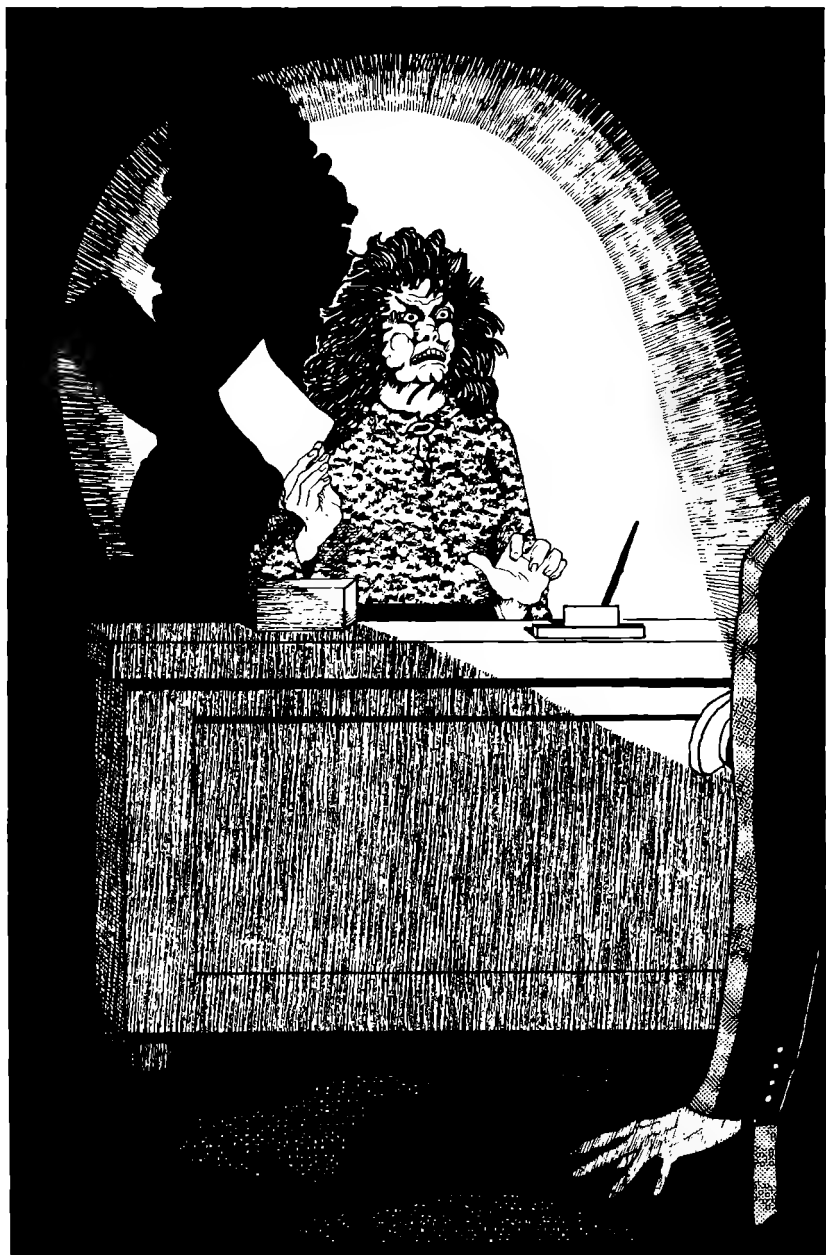
"What was it?"

"A faint odour. Faint enough to be almost imaginary. Of civet." Bancroft shrugged. "The guard spoke of a beast, an animal. The odour gave tenuous confirmation. Now, the whole tale is incredible, and has the sound of a perfervid imagination. But I call to mind one of your own maxims, Solar—that the most prosaic matters may be most untrue, and the most incredible be true. Moreover, there was an incident which took place three days ago, as you deduced. As it happened, I was in an adjoining office at the time.

"Ricoletti had just come to his office that morning and had begun to go through his post. His door was standing open. He had been carrying on a conversation with McAlester, who is in the office across the corridor, and McAlester had just come to the door in time to see Ricoletti standing at his desk, as pale as death, holding in his hand a personal letter. McAlester was just about to ask Ricoletti what the matter was, when Ricoletti collapsed in a swoon, from which we could not rouse him for ten minutes. I heard him fall, I heard McAlester's cry, I was there in a moment.

"The letter was instantly photographed and replaced, since it appeared to concern a personal matter. I examined the envelope; it had been posted in Limehouse, but there was no address, neither on the envelope nor on the letter. The letter, however, appears to be perfectly innocuous; our experts have been over it with no result; it is certainly not in code, and a cryptogram has eluded them. I have a copy of it here, together with a dossier on Ricoletti. Ricoletti, of course, accounted for his swoon by saying that he had suffered a great disappointment. Will you look at this letter?"

He took it from a manila envelope in his pocket and flattened the copy on the desk. Pons and I bent above it. The letter was written in a loose, irregular script.





"London, 17th Sept.

"DEAR RICO,

"£1,000 does not seem to me quite enough for so substantial a property. I spoke to C. and he did not think so either. After all, the house is in excellent condition, and it has all the seclusion you desire — far more than you may now be occupying.

"In a week or so C. and I will have an architect appraise the property with more detailed care, for there may quite possibly have been errors made which ought to be rectified. There are so many factors which enter into a picture like this and no one ought to suffer at another's expense.

"Ten days from now should see the matter settled in one way or another. Or would you prefer to select an architect yourself? It would be perfectly agreeable to us, you know, though I don't know that the picture would be much changed.

"I am sure that whatever your decision will be, C. and I will go along with it. We just feel at the present that the price you have offered is not enough. Perhaps we could compromise at £1,200? Or does that seem too much?

"The reverse of the wainscoting in the living-room, about which we talked, shows that the wood is ash. The paint can be removed, but of course there is no telling what the removal of the paint will show. The reverse is in good condition, however.

"Address C. in care of Guy's if you want to write to him directly.

"He has as much interest in this as I have, perhaps more, though his principal concerns are elsewhere nowadays.

"Soon I hope to see you and settle the matter. I know you want the house preserved until you can make a decision.

"Sincerely, A."

"It seems anything but a profoundly disturbing letter," observed Bancroft. "Yet its effect on Ricoletti was indescribable. He destroyed it immediately on returning to consciousness, unaware that we had had it photographed. He was offered the rest of the day as a holiday, but he refused. From that moment he was under observation, but this revealed nothing, for Ricoletti is a man of methodical habits from which he does not deviate. Nevertheless, the

Foreign Office cannot afford to take any chance whatsoever, and until we can be certain that this affair does not concern his work, we must be vigilant. If, indeed, it is personal, we need not look into it; that it may not be is indicated by the nocturnal visitor of the early hours of this morning. Let me tell you something about Ricoletti."

"Later," said Pons. "Give me a few moments to examine the room."

"Very well."

Pons began an intensive scrutiny of desk, window, and door, crawling about on the floor beneath the desk. Bancroft picked up the letter, folded it once more, and restored it to the envelope; he viewed Pons's activities with something akin to patient tolerance, glancing at his watch from time to time.

"Come, come, Solar, we are wasting time," he protested at last. "We have been over the room with every instrument Scotland Yard has at its disposal. There was nothing to be discovered. We have dust from Hampstead, which is hardly unexpected. We have lint from McAlester's trousers; that is not an earth-shaking discovery."

Pons, I saw, was inclined to agree. He came to his feet.

"But you will want to know who had keys to this room and Ricoletti's desk," continued Bancroft. "The guard, to the room only. Ricoletti, of course, and the Chief to both room and desk. There are thus but two sets of keys for the desk, three for the door. The Chief's keys had not been disturbed—unless they were taken and returned. The remaining possibilities are evident."

"The guard's story is untrue; someone took an impression of a set of keys; or someone used Ricoletti's keys," replied Pons. "Let us begin with the guard. I will talk to him."

"I thought you would like to. He is in the Chief's room waiting for us. I should tell you that Ricoletti was under observation last night; he cannot drive a car, and did not leave his house until his chauffeur came for him this morning. In fact, the only movement from the house at all was an old woman who had evidently been visiting Mrs. Ricoletti; she left before midnight."

"Where is Ricoletti's car kept?" Pons put in.

"It is not at the house, but in a rented garage down the street a few hundred yards away and round the corner. Are you finished here?"

Pons nodded.

"Then come."

The guard was a young man, fresh-faced and manifestly eager to

be helpful, though at the moment ill-at-ease and unhappy. Yet his intelligent brown eyes were alert, and his soft full lips were pursed expectantly.

"My brother wishes to ask you some questions, Mr. Stoward," said Bancroft without the formality of an introduction.

"Yes, sir."

"Your name?" asked Pons.

"Frederic Stoward."

"You've seen service, I notice. Decorated for bravery."

"Under fire, sir."

"Mons."

"Yes, sir. And Ypres."

"And wounded."

"Twice."

"You were in action for some time."

"Almost the entire course of the war."

"You must then have seen some soul-shaking sights, Mr. Stoward. Did any of them send you reeling?"

"No, Mr. Pons. They made me ill at times, but, of course, you expect things like that at the front. Not here."

Pons smiled grimly. "Will you just tell us what took place last night?"

"Yes, sir. I was on duty. Came on at midnight. At about a quarter-past two o'clock this morning, I was standing in the doorway—the night was very warm, with a light fog—when I thought I heard a woman calling for help. I ran outside at once as far as the kerb, but there was no recurrence of the call and no disturbance. I returned to my post immediately. It occurred to me somewhat later that the call might have been a ruse."

"How much later?" interjected Pons.

"Ten or fifteen minutes. I immediately began to make a routine examination of the building. When I came to Mr. Ricoletti's room, I saw nothing to indicate that his room had been entered. I unlocked the door and flashed my light from one side to the other. I saw something sitting at the desk; it appeared to be examining papers. I did not then believe it could have been a human being. Mr. Pons, it had long, black hair, and a horrible, warty skin, out of which shone small, gleaming eyes. I was so astonished that I staggered backward, tripping as I reached for the light-switch. At the same time, a little pencil of light struck upward from the desk and I saw the horrible swollen travesty of a face for the second time. It

seemed to rise up from a blackness which might have been its body. While I was groping for the light-switch, something struck me, and I was knocked out.

"When I came to, I switched on the light. The room was undisturbed; there were no papers on the desk; there was nothing to show that anyone had been there, except a bruise on my temple."

Pons fingered the lobe of his left ear thoughtfully. "You have mentioned the animal-like appearance of the room's invader. Did it suggest any specific animal to you?"

"Mr. Pons, it was like nothing I have ever seen before," said Stoward earnestly. "Except that it recalled certain hospital cases I encountered during the war."

"Something has been said of a peculiar odour in the room. Did you notice any unusual smell?"

"Yes."

"A perfume?"

"Rather a musk. It was very strong just when I was struck."

"The smell of an animal," said Bancroft curtly. "It lingered."

"Have you any idea what struck you?" asked Pons. "You mentioned 'a pencil of light.' Could it have been a torch?"

"Yes. Or a paperweight."

"Very well. That is all, Mr. Stoward."

Bancroft Pons was gazing impatiently at his watch again. "Let us be on our way, Solar. I can add what remains to be said on the way back to Praed Street."

Outside, the rain had now entirely abated, and the wind was beginning to diminish. Our cab still waited where we had left it and, once we were inside, moved off toward Praed Street somewhat more slowly than we had come from our quarters, at Bancroft's explicit directive.

"I have no desire to repeat data which can be found in our dossier on Ricoletti," said Bancroft. "That carries you up to the time of his employment in our cryptography division. Since coming to London, Ricoletti has lived a most circumspect and secluded life. He bought his home in Hampstead, had certain alterations made there, and then sent for his wife to join him; she was then waiting in Barbados. Since her coming, neither of them has moved about socially at all. Ricoletti leaves the office, is invariably driven straight home, and does not stir from the house until his chauffeur comes in the morning to take him back to work. His routine never varies.

"At work he remains at his desk save for two interludes: he takes his lunch away from his work, and in mid-afternoon he goes out and indulges in one solitary drink, usually a scotch and soda. He takes tea in his office at four. He leaves customarily in time for dinner at home, but on occasion, when special tasks are assigned to him, he is kept later. Whenever he is so detained, he faithfully telephones his wife that he will be late."

"A man of singular habits," mused Pons. "And since he received this disturbing letter, what variations have been observed in his behaviour?"

"In the major pattern, none. But there are upsetting and, I hold, indicative minor variations. He has abandoned his mid-afternoon drink. He has seemed frightened, furtive, shrunk together, as if he expected some blow to fall. On two of the three days since then, he has not taken his lunch, and he has shown a marked apprehension of the post, though he has been unable to ignore it."

"He did not seem furtive this evening," said Pons thoughtfully.

"You anticipate me," replied Bancroft testily. "I will tell the story in my own way, if you please. We notified Ricoletti this morning of the invasion of his office last night. He was profoundly upset. He immediately examined all his effects and declared that none of them was missing. Yet his agitation was in no way diminished. I was present at the time, and I watched him closely. Now, Solar, Ricoletti first examined the top drawer of his desk, in which presumably he keeps papers pertinent to work in progress. He then went through every other drawer methodically, after which he examined his filing cabinet with great care. He stood for a moment in honest perplexity, as far as I could ascertain his attitude. Then, quite suddenly, he picked up his wastepaper-basket, emptied it on his desk, and pawed through the crumpled papers and envelopes with shaking hands. Only after he had finished, did he assure us that none of our papers was missing."

"Let me interrupt," put in Pons. "Surely, after Ricoletti's receipt of that disturbing letter, you had his post watched?"

"Dear me, yes. We were, of course, watching for the recurrence of the photographed script. Ricoletti received another letter in that same hand yesterday morning."

"You did not examine the letter?"

"No. There was no reason to believe that letter was not a personal matter. There are certain limitations we must observe."

"And his reaction at its receipt?"



"There was no reaction."

"Ah," said Pons cryptically, and smiled.

"But I should add," continued Bancroft, "that Ricoletti was entirely his old self after lunch today."

"He took lunch today, then?"

"Yes. He went to Piero's. He ate alone. He spoke to no one, except the cashier on his way out. Oh, the waiter, of course." He peered from the window of the cab. "Here we are at 7B. Are there any further questions, Solar?"

"Only one suggests itself," replied Pons. "Is there any manifest reason why the Ricolettis do not take part in social activities?"

"There is evidently some sensitivity about Ricoletti's deformity," replied Bancroft. He hesitated reflectively. Then, shrugging, he added, "His wife seems to share his desire for seclusion. I need hardly tell you that the Foreign Office considers a reclusive cryptographer rather an asset than otherwise. There is some unsavoury gossip about Mrs. Ricoletti; I once heard someone speak of her as 'that abominable woman.' But then, as you will learn from the dossier, she was a West Indian, and one might expect her presence in Hampstead to arouse prejudice in some quarters."

As the cab came to a stop before our lodgings, Bancroft handed Pons the manila envelope containing Ricoletti's dossier.

"If you need me again, you have my number and have only to call," said Bancroft.

"I hardly think it will be necessary, apart from presenting you with the solution of this intriguing little riddle."

"Which is no doubt already completely obvious to you, my dear Solar?" said Bancroft, smiling.

"That is not beyond the realm of the possible," agreed Pons amiably, and bade his brother good-night.

Once again comfortably ensconced in our quarters, Pons turned to the dossier on Ricoletti. There were not many papers in the manila envelope, and most of them were copies. The recent letter, Pons laid to one side. He took up first two pages of biographical data.

"Hum! An education at Oxford. Balliol," he murmured presently. "He would appear to have been the only son of a fairly prosperous greengrocer in the City. Some Continental post-graduate work at Bonn and Prague. He entered the foreign service at thirty, and spent two years at a consulate in Brazil. Another year at Peking.

He is evidently a master of languages. Two more years in Dutch Guiana, and finally to the Dutch West Indies. Consul at Willemstad, Curaçao, for seven years. Then to his present position, in which he seems to be contented."

He turned to several of the other enclosures, scrutinized them briefly, and cast them aside. "Ricoletti seems to be an admirable servant of the government. Here are copies of commendations from several official sources and a record of a decoration by His Majesty. He would appear to be singularly devoted to his work, and has achieved an enviable position as perhaps the outstanding cryptanalyst in the realm. Does he have the sound of an intriguer to you, Parker?"

"Emphatically not."

"I agree. Nevertheless, there are several points of interest which can hardly be overlooked. The description of the 'beast' in Ricoletti's office, for one. Did that convey nothing to you?"

"I thought it had the sound of a hallucination."

"Well, the guard's story is either true or not true. If not true, he could certainly have imagined a more credible tale. His complicity would then also be involved. But nothing was taken—at least, nothing official was taken. You will bear in mind that Ricoletti told Bancroft that none of 'our papers' was missing; he did not say 'nothing' had been taken. I submit that while the negative does not necessarily postulate the positive, there is a very strong probability that something of Ricoletti's was taken. Yet it does not seem to have been anything of intrinsic value, for Ricoletti's actions, as observed by Bancroft, suggest that it was removed from the wastepaper-basket. I think we can proceed, therefore, from the assumption that the guard's story was true as he told it. He saw something which made him think of an animal. That suggests nothing to you, Parker?"

"Someone in disguise, I daresay."

"Come, come, Parker, try again. The sight was enough to shock an experienced ex-soldier like Stoward. But Stoward himself suggested a comparison."

"I am not unaware that he did," I retorted. "But if you expect me to believe that any person so badly diseased as to shock into semi-paralysis a man like Stoward could pass about London streets without exciting comment, you will have to try again. I am afraid, Pons, that whatever theory you have, it is untenable. Consider the

risks of breaking into a room in the Foreign Office building for nothing more than a scrap of paper in a wastepaper-basket!"

"Or the information on it. That might be a different matter, Parker. I submit that Ricoletti might well have worked out a complete code on a scrap of paper and thrown it away after transcribing it, though his previous diligence suggests that as unlikely. And the risks. What are they?"

"The keys, for one thing," I replied with spirit.

"Yes, the problem of the keys has certain points of interest. Of the three sets, none appears to have been used. Yet one set was undoubtedly in use last night. We can eliminate the guard's, since we have begun by accepting his story as objective truth. This leaves Ricoletti's set and those in the office of the Chief; of these, the likelier set to have been used is Ricoletti's, though a wax impression might have been made of the Chief's set just as well. The guard's set, however, might be eliminated on more than his story's count—he had no set of desk keys, and the intruder evidently did, though we have no direct evidence that this is so, for the guard's story corroborated only part of Bancroft's. Moreover, the conclusion is inescapable that if anything was taken, it was something of personal concern to Ricoletti; if someone had made a wax impression of the Chief's keys, then it is reasonable to suppose that the interloper had an interest in official papers.

"The guard recounted, you will remember, that when he flashed the light toward the desk, it was covered with papers. Only a short while later, the desk was in order. Now, then, if the contents of the drawers had been placed on the desk, I submit that it could not have been got back into order in the little time that the guard was unconscious. Therefore, it is not amiss to conclude that the papers the guard saw on the desk were the contents of the wastepaper-basket; these could have been swept back into place in the space of moments. But actually, there is little mystery about the invasion of Ricoletti's office."

"Indeed!" I cried. "Next thing you will be telling me you know who entered it."

"Let us say, rather, I am reasonably certain of his identity," replied Pons. "No, the mystery lies primarily in the letter. And I daresay I detect its point of reference in this paragraph of Ricoletti's dossier."

I looked to where Pons indicated and read:

"Ricoletti requested transfer from Willemstad in 1910 after the unfortunate death of Cyrus Cryder, a colonial who was shot in self-defence by Ricoletti, following an attack made on Ricoletti by Cryder. Though the testimony of a clerk in Ricoletti's office exonerated Ricoletti of all blame, Ricoletti persisted in his request for transfer. His ability in analysis and composition of cryptograms having come to the attention of the Foreign Office, Ricoletti was ordered to London to be prepared against crises on the Continent."

I gazed at Pons in undisguised astonishment. "And how does the letter refer to this? Perhaps it is a cryptogram, but I confess it seems only a casual letter about the purchase of a house."

"Come, come, Parker. Ricoletti, to the best of our knowledge, is not buying a house; he owns one. No, the letter is a little masterpiece of subtle menace. Pray examine it again."

I took the copy and read the letter carefully a second time.

"I can hardly imagine a more innocuous communication," I said at last. "If there is a cipher here, it is hidden too deeply for me. But I am no cryptographer; I do not pretend to be."

"The message is so simply presented that the experts at the Foreign Office failed to understand it for its very simplicity. It looks out at you, Parker, though doubtless the experts were looking for something quite different. Pray read it carefully once more. Meanwhile, I will just have a look at the newspapers."

With some exasperation, I turned once more to the letter, while Pons began to look rapidly through the morning and evening papers, all of which were faithfully brought to our lodgings, for Pons carefully cut them for his voluminous files on crimes of London and the provinces, together with summaries of Continental and American crimes.

In but a few moments Pons gave a sharp cry of delight, and placed before me a morning paper folded to a brief bulletin.

### MURDER IN LIMEHOUSE

A body identified as that of Andrew Walton, a seaman, late of Barbados, was found early this morning in a room at the Wander Inn, Limehouse Causeway. Walton, who

had taken lodging at the Inn a week ago, was off the freighter, *Captain Christensen*. Evidence indicated that he had been strangled in the early hours of the morning, for his body was still warm when it was discovered shortly after six o'clock. The Metropolitan Police have received reports that an animal-like person was seen in the vicinity of the Wander Inn between three and four o'clock this morning. Police are investigating.

"I submit it is no coincidence that a human being described as 'animal-like' should be reported twice in one evening," said Pons. "They are surely not two, but one. And this crime, which followed chronologically upon the entry of Ricoletti's room at the Foreign Office, was surely the occasion of Ricoletti's attitude after lunch to-day. He spoke to no one but the waiter and the cashier; but almost certainly he saw a paper, for the story was there, and he is too conscientious to read his paper during working hours."

I handed the letter back to him. "The problem only becomes more mystifying," I said.

"On the contrary, it is now entirely explicable," reported Pons.

"Oh, come, Pons, you cannot be serious!"

"I have never been more so. Let us examine the problem from its beginning. The letter. If we take the initial word of each paragraph, we have the following sequence of words:

'£1,000 In Ten Or I Reverse Address Soon'

Now this enigmatic letter becomes clear as daylight, and Ricoletti read its full meaning at once. Small wonder that he fell into a swoon, for the letter told him that the clerk who had testified in his favour at the inquiry into Cyrus Cryder's death was now prepared to reverse his testimony unless Ricoletti paid him a thousand pounds. For what else could be 'reverse' but testimony, that would do Ricoletti harm? So what his brief message amounted to was an ultimatum to Ricoletti to deliver a thousand pounds in ten days, or he would reverse his testimony. He would send his address soon, so that Ricoletti could deliver the money to him. It did not matter that eleven years had gone by, and that such a reversal might be seriously questioned; Ricoletti's career would be ruined, and Ricoletti had more than usually strong reasons for preventing such

a contingency, as the writer of this blackmailing letter well knew. But let us give the writer his name; he signs his letter simply A., for Andrew Walton, late of Barbados.

"With this knowledge, turn to the letter again and you will understand that all this casual writing of a house has a double meaning. The house is nothing more than Ricoletti's life; the C. to whom reference is made, is the late Cyrus Cryder, who can be addressed, note the irony of it, in care of 'Guy's.' Ricoletti understood it full well; he realized its implications, too—that once he began to pay Walton, he would be subject forever after to his demands. But what else could he do?"

"What he did," I put in. "Kill him."

"Dear me, Parker," murmured Pons in protest, "you have a disturbing faculty of leaping to conclusions. Ricoletti could do only one thing, as he saw it; he must prepare to make the payment demanded of him. So he began to do so, waiting upon another communication which would convey the address to which the money must be sent. But in doing so, he aroused suspicion in other quarters than those of his employment. Whether he was aware of having done so, none can say. But you can well imagine his delight at discovering this morning that the predatory Walton would plague him no more. Small wonder that he was once again his old self, as Bancroft observed."

My patience with Pons was wearing dangerously thin. I protested, "If Ricoletti did not kill him, who did?"

"Someone who looked like a beast," replied Pons simply. "The same individual who invaded Ricoletti's office. Let me hazard a guess, though I may well be in error. The murderer is a sufferer from a disease uncommon in these latitudes; you will recall Stoward's description—a 'horrible, swollen travesty of a face.' It suggested something to me at once, rare even in the latitudes where it occurs. Sometimes a commoner form of the disease is called 'Barbados leg.' "

"Elephantiasis!" I exclaimed.

"Capital, Parker, capital!" cried Pons. "I submit that *elephantiasis arabum*, or filarial elephantiasis, of the face, with its characteristic coarse, wart-like skin, with possible varicose ulcers, would excite the descriptions we have encountered."

"But surely such an individual could be discovered with ease," I protested.

"Perhaps," said Pons enigmatically. "I fancy the man to identify Walton's murderer is Ricoletti himself. I propose to ask him without further delay."

He came to his feet as he spoke, a gleam in his eyes that would not be gainsaid.

"But the hour," I cried. "It is almost midnight. You could call on him at his office tomorrow."

"No, no, Parker," Pons answered impatiently. "It is the house I am most desirous of seeing. Must it not indeed be a veritable paradise that man would seclude himself within its walls with no desire to leave it save for the monotony of his work? If you will be so good as to telephone for a cab, we will be on our way without waiting upon the Underground."

The house which belonged to Orso Ricoletti brooded darkly on the edge of Hampstead Heath, from which came the aroma of wet foliage, for, though rainfall had ceased, a thick fog was beginning to rise, and carried with it the multiple odours of the city and, in this place, of the surrounding countryside. I had remonstrated with Pons all the way in vain; he had set his heart on knocking up Ricoletti, and no other time would do.

We made our way to the front door, upon which Pons beat a rattling tattoo. Beyond the house, the undulations of Hampstead Heath, with its birches and poplars, shone spectrally in the semi-darkness, for there was a moon behind the now thinning clouds, and a kind of iridescence illuminated the scene. The house, at the end of a street adjoining the Heath, was attractive yet simple, without ornateness in its exterior. Pons knocked again; there was no bell-push to be seen, for Pons had struck a match to search for it.

We waited yet longer, but presently a light went up inside.

"Ah, it is Ricoletti himself," whispered Pons. "He has stopped to put on his shoes. What a pity he should be so afflicted."

The door opened suddenly and the cryptographer stood there, clad in a dressing-gown, his feet shod, and carrying in one hand a stout cane, leaded at one end, and in the other an electric lantern.

"Mr. Ricoletti," said Pons softly.

"I am Ricoletti."

"My name is Solar Pons. My companion is Dr. Lyndon Parker."

There was a sharp intake of breath from the sallow-faced man on the threshold. "Ah, Bancroft's brother. I have heard of you, Mr. Pons. Please come in."

He stepped aside as he spoke, waited until we had passed him, then closed the door behind us and walked around us to lead the way in his slow fashion to a sitting-room, which he lit by pressing a button with his cane. Soft, diffused lights, set low around the walls, came into being. The room was comfortable and well-appointed, but its furnishings were distinctly foreign, save for such added pieces which contributed to physical comfort and did not conflict with the West Indian theme of the decoration. There was present in the house a marked, animal-like musk, not unpleasant, but provocative.

I forebore to ask about it, but Ricoletti himself mentioned it at once. "I trust the aroma does not offend you. I am used to it. It is a West Indian perfume my wife likes to use." He turned, having reached the farther wall of the room. "Please sit down. I know you would not have come to see me except on a matter of the utmost urgency to you."

"And to you," said Pons.

Ricoletti sighed. His dark eyes seemed infinitely weary and sad, his sensitive mouth was twisted as if with pain. "Of course, it is about the office," he said. "I told them none of the papers had been taken; I assured them solemnly there was no occasion for concern. But I know the Chief; he will not rest until he knows."

"He waits only on my assurance, Mr. Ricoletti," said Pons. "That is why I am here."

"I give you that," said Ricoletti passionately. "Pray believe me, Mr. Pons. The entire matter has been explained, and nothing further will come of it."

"But there are a few minor points," Pons went on relentlessly. "There is a reasonable probability that your keys were used to effect entrance to your office last night."

"Impossible. My keys were in my pocket when I went to bed; they were there when I woke up."

"Could someone not have abstracted them in the night?"

"Sir, my wife and I live here alone."

"Did you by chance have visitors last evening?"

"We never entertain visitors, Mr. Pons. Except for an urgent messenger from the office one night in 1914, no one but you two gentlemen has ever been inside this house," said Ricoletti gravely. "How can I assure you, so that you, in turn, can convince the Chief there is no reason for their concern?"

"Ah, there is no need to assure me, Mr. Ricoletti," said Pons. "I



know very well that the matter was an entirely personal one. The only question which remains is this: was Cyrus Cryder's death self-defence, or was it not?"

"Sir, the evidence at the trial was satisfactory."

"Ah, but you see, I have read Andrew Walton's letter," said Pons softly.

Ricoletti's head jerked up, his lips parted in dismay. Then he covered his face with his hands and rocked his slender body to and fro in despair.

"I might have known," he said at last. "They photographed the letter."

"And now that Andrew Walton has been murdered," began Pons.

"Mr. Pons, I beg you to believe me. Cryder had made overtures of the vilest kind to my wife. He came to my office one day, drunk, and attacked me; I shot him. I was unable to prevent his death. Walton's testimony was true, but he had fallen on evil days. He had written me from Barbados, asking for money; I had sent him some, but not at the urgency of a threat; he had previously not uttered any threats. I had not heard from him for years, believe me; his letter came like a bolt from the blue against which I had no defence. Everything would have been lost, my position—though that did not matter—my home and my wife, and that did. I had to pay, or be involved in scandal which would have ruined my life, no matter how certainly I might have been cleared, and I would have been. I am glad Walton is dead, but I did not kill him."

"My visit here is entirely unofficial, Mr. Ricoletti," said Pons. "I know nothing of any murder you may have committed."

There was a sudden rustle from the adjoining corridor, and in a moment a woman stepped into the room.

"I think you gentlemen are looking for me," she said in a harsh but steady voice.

Then I saw her face. It was a horrible, blasphemous mockery of a human face, swollen and coarse, warty and ulcerous; its features were askew, as were it a grotesque and repulsive mask; it was more than twice as large as it ought to have been, making a further mockery of the well-proportioned body beneath it; if ever it had had any natural beauty, that beauty had vanished without trace. The woman was dark-skinned, younger than Ricoletti, and despite the grotesquerie of her head, she walked with lithe grace to where Ricoletti sat and reached down for his hand.

I controlled my features only with the utmost effort.

Pons came to his feet. "No, Mrs. Ricoletti, we are looking for no one. We came only to assure your husband we could convince his superiors that there was no further cause for alarm at the invasion of his office which someone made last night. Neither of us is an official, and if I were to guess that someone had drugged your husband, taken his keys, taken his car, driven to his office to find the address of the man who was blackmailing him because he would not himself reveal it, and then gone there to that inn in Limehouse and strangled him to protect your husband, I would be too far from being able to submit proof to dare offer the hypothesis."

For a long minute the two of them faced us—he sitting there with his malformed foot before him, she standing at his side, their hands clasped, her horrible face turned in our direction but seeming to look beyond us.

"Fifteen years," whispered Ricoletti then, and only clasped her hand more tightly.

"Please tell them," said Mrs. Ricoletti, "that my husband has done nothing, that no one is interested in his work."

"I shall have nothing other to report," said Pons.

"Thank you," said Ricoletti.

In the cab Pons leaned back, his chin sunk upon his chest, his eyes closed.

"Was there from the beginning the possibility of any other solution, Parker?" he asked. "I daresay not. The keys were Ricoletti's, certainly; he might have suspected that they had been used. He might have known. We shall not know. But I am certain that what happened can readily be imagined. It would have been impossible for Ricoletti to conceal his agitation from his wife, after he had read Walton's threat, however much he might strive to keep from her anything to worry her. But she must have divined when Walton's address reached her husband, perhaps by his actions—the preparations to send Walton money without further delay, a kind of lessening of his tension undoubtedly. He had not brought it home; he meant to deal with Walton on Walton's terms. She, too, foresaw Walton's ultimate plan and forestalled it. She may have drugged him; I think it likely that she did, taken his keys, gone for the car—you will remember that she was seen to leave the house, but the guard thought it was some late visitor—and found Walton's address in her husband's wastepaper-basket at his office. She lost no time going to Limehouse and strangled Walton.

"Who can say where the largest measure of guilt lies? I loathe a blackmailer above all other criminals; he preys upon the weaknesses of his fellow-humans. And can you put yourself into her place? Conceive what torture she must have endured through these years, looking like an abomination on the face of the earth, a solitary by necessity, but still sharing a love that did not falter throughout her adversity. That house was their haven; their security lay in each other. Walton threatened it. She knew that if Walton had his way, their security would soon be gone; she knew that if she were caught, then, too, that precious security was lost, they would be parted, perhaps forever, since neither is any longer young. It did not matter. Perhaps she tried to reason with Walton; but I doubt even that. She went there to kill him and did so."

"But if she did kill him, Pons," I remonstrated, "it was murder. You have an obligation to lay your evidence before the authorities."

"Ah, but I have no evidence," said Pons, smiling. "My only obligation is to Bancroft and the Foreign Office in this matter; I can give them the assurance they want and need. I can do no more. My conjectures are of no interest to the police or Scotland Yard, and I have no desire to pursue them to actionable proof. No, Parker, I detect in this little matter the hand of Providence; and I have no desire to interfere with her inscrutable workings."

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# *The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians*

## I.

"THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON," said Solar Pons from his place at the windows of our quarters at 7B, Praed Street, "holds the promise of being a merry one, after the quiet week just past. Flakes of snow are dancing in the air and what I see below enchants me. Just step over here, Parker, and have a look."

I put down the book I was reading and went over to stand beside him.

Outside, the snowflakes were large and soft, shrouding the street-light which had come on early in the winter dusk, and enclosing, like a vision from the past, the scene at the kerb—a hansom cab, no less, drawn by a horse that looked almost as ancient as the vehicle, for it stood with a dejected air while its master got out of the cab, leaning on his stick.

"It has been years since I have seen a hansom cab," I said. "Ten, at least—if not more. And that must surely be its owner."

The man getting out of the cab could be seen but dimly, but he wore a coat of ankle length, fitting his thin frame almost like an outer skin, and an old beaver hat that added its height to his, and when he turned to look up at the number above our outer entrance, I saw that he wore a grizzled beard and square spectacles.

"Could he have the wrong address?" I wondered.

"I fervently hope not," said Pons. "The wrong century, perhaps, but not, I pray, the wrong address."

"No, he is coming in."

"Capital, capital!" cried Pons, rubbing his hands together and turning from the window to look expectantly toward the door.

We listened in silence as the cabman applied below to Mrs. Johnson, our landlady, and then to his climbing the stairs, a little wheezily, but withal more like a young man than an old.

"But he clutches the rail," said Pons, as if he had read my thoughts. "Listen to his nails scrape the wall."

At the first touch of the old fellow's stick on the door, Pons strode forward to throw it open.

"Mr. Solar Pons?" asked our visitor in a thin, rather querulous voice.

"Pray come in, sir," said Pons.

"Before I do, I'll want to know how much it will cost," said our client.

"It costs nothing to come in," said Pons, his eyes dancing.

"Everything is so dear these days," complained the old fellow as he entered our quarters. "And money isn't easily come by. And too readily spent, sir, too readily spent."

I offered him a seat, and took his hat.

He wore, I saw now, the kind of black half-gloves customarily worn by clerks, that came over his wrists to his knuckles. Seeing me as for the first time, he pointed his cane at me and asked of Pons, "Who's he?"

"Dr. Parker is my companion."

He looked me up and down suspiciously, pushing his thin lips out and sucking them in, his eyes narrowed. His skin was the colour of parchment, and his clothes, like his hat, were green with age.

"But you have the advantage of us, sir," said Pons.

"My name is Ebenezer Snawley." Then he turned to me and stuck out an arm. "They're Pip's," he said, referring to the clerical cuffs, which I saw now they were. "No need for him to wear 'em. He's inside, and I'm out, and it would be a shameful waste to spend good money on gloves for the few times I go out in such weather." His eyes narrowed a trifle more. "Are you a medical man?"

I assured him that I was.

"Have a look at that, Doctor," he said, indicating a small growth on one finger.

I examined it and pronounced it the beginning of a wart.

"Ah, then it's of no danger to my health. I thank you. As you're not in your surgery, no doubt there'll be no fee."

"Doctor Parker is a poor man," said Pons.

"So am I, sir. So am I," said Snawley. "But I had to come to you," he added in an aggrieved voice. "The police only laugh at me. I applied to them to have the nuisance stopped."

"What is the nature of the nuisance?" asked Pons.

"Aha! you've not told me your fee for consultation," said Snawley.

"I am accustomed to setting my fee in accordance with the amount of work I must do," said Pons. "In some cases there is no fee at all."

"No fee? No fee at all?"

"We do on occasion manifest the spirit of Christmas," continued Pons.

"Christmas! Humbug!" protested our client.

"Do not say so," said Pons.

"Christmas is a time for well-meaning fools to go about bestowing useless gifts on other fools," our client went on testily.

"But you did not come to discuss the season," said Pons gently.

"You are right, sir. I thank you for reminding me. I came because of late I have been much troubled by some fellow who marches up and down before my house bawling street songs."

"Are they offensive songs?"

Our visitor shook his head irritably. "Any song is offensive if I do not wish to hear it."

"Scurrilous?"

"Street songs."

"Do you know their words?"

"Indeed, and I do, Mr. Pons. And I should. 'Crack 'em and try 'em, before you buy 'em eight a-penny. All new walnuts. Crack 'em and try 'em, before you buy 'em. A shilling a-hundred. All new walnuts,' " he said in mimicry. "And such as 'Rope mat! Door mat! You really must buy one to save the mud and dust; think of the dirt brought from the street for the want of a mat to wipe your feet!' Indeed I do know them. They are old London street cries."

Pons's eyes now fairly glowed with pleasure. "Ah, he sells walnuts and rope mats."

"A ragbag of a fellow. Sometimes it is hats—three, four at a time on his head. Sometimes it is cress. Sometimes flowers. And ever and anon walnuts. I could not chew 'em even if I bought 'em—and there's small likelihood of that. Catch me wasting good money like that! Not likely."

"He has a right to the street," observed Pons.

"But Mr. Pons, sir, he limits himself to the street along my property. My house is on the corner, set back a trifle, with a bit of land around it—I like my privacy. He goes no farther than the edge of my property on the one side, then back around the corner to the line of my property on the other. It is all done to annoy me—or for some other reason—perhaps to get into the house and lay hands on my valuables."

"He could scarcely effect an entrance more noisily," said Pons, reflectively. "Perhaps he is only observing the Christmas season and wishes to favour you with its compliments."

"Humbug!" said Snawley in a loud voice, and with such a

grimace that it seemed to me he could not have made it more effectively had he practised it in front of a mirror.

"Is he young?"

"If any young fellow had a voice so cracked, I'd send him to a doctor." He shook his head vigorously. "He can't be less than middle-aged. No, sir. Not with a voice like that. He could sour the apples in a barrel with such a voice."

"How often does he come?"

"Why, sir, it is just about every night. I am plagued by his voice, by his very presence, and now he has taken to adding Christmas songs to his small repertoire, it is all the more trying. But chiefly I am plagued—I will confess it—by my curiosity about the reason for this attention he bestows upon me. I sent Pip—Pip is my clerk, retired, now, like myself, with his wife dead and his children all out in the world, even the youngest, who finally recovered his health—I sent Pip, I say, out to tell him to be off, and he but laughed at him, and gave him a walnut or two for himself, and sent one along for me! The impudence of the fellow!" His chin whiskers literally trembled with his indignation.

Pons had folded his arms across his chest, clasping his elbows with his lean fingers, holding in his mirth, which danced around his mouth and in his eyes. "But," he said, visibly controlling himself, "if you are a poor man, you can scarcely be in possession of valuables someone else might covet."

Plainly now our client was torn between the desire to maintain the face he had put upon himself, and to lift a little of it for us to see him a trifle more clearly; for he sat in dour silence.

"Unless," pursued Pons, "you have valuables of a more intangible nature. I suspect you are a collector."

Our visitor started violently. "Why do you say so?"

"I submit that coat you are wearing cannot be newer than 1890, the waistcoat likewise. Your cane is gold-headed; I have not seen such a cane about since 1910. Heavy, too. I suspect it is loaded. And what you have left outside is a period piece—obviously your own, since you drove it yourself. No one who had worn your clothing steadily since it was made could present it still in such good condition."

"You are as sharp as they say you are," said our client grudgingly. "It's true I'm a collector."

"Of books," said Pons.







"Books and such," assented Snawley. "Though how you can tell it I don't pretend to know."

"The smell of ink and paper makes a special kind of mustiness, Mr. Snawley. You carry it. And, I take it, you are particularly fond of Dickens."

Snawley's jaw dropped; his mouth hung momentarily agape. "You amaze me," he said.

"Dr. Parker charges me with amazing him for the past year and a half, since he took up residence here," said Pons. "It will do you no harm. It has done him none."

"How, Mr. Pons, do you make out Dickens?"

"Those street songs you know so well are those of Dickens's day. Since you made a point of saying you should know them, it is certainly not far wide of the mark to suggest that you are a Dickensian."

A wintry smile briefly touched our client's lips, but he suppressed it quickly. "I see I have made no mistake in coming to you. It is really the obligation of the police, but they are forever about getting out of their obligations. It is the way of the new world, I fear. But I had heard of you, and I turned it over in mind several days, and I concluded that it would be less dear to call on you than to ask you to call on me. So I came forthwith."

"Nevertheless," said Pons, his eyes twinkling, "I fancy we shall have to have a look at that fellow who, you say, is making such a nuisance of himself."

Our client made a rapid calculation, as was evident by the concentration in his face. "Then you had better come back with me now," he said, "for if you come at any other time, the price of the conveyance will surely be added to the bill."

"That is surely agreeable with me," said Pons. "If it will do for Parker."

Snawley bridled with apprehension. "Does he come, too?"

"Indeed, he does."

"Will he be added to the fee?"

"No, Mr. Snawley."

"Well, then, I will just go below and wait for you to come down," said our client, coming to his feet and seizing his hat from the mantel where I had put it next to Pons's unanswered letters, unfolded and affixed to the mantel by a dagger, a souvenir of one of his adventures.

Our client had hardly taken himself off before Pons's laughter burst forth.

When he had recovered himself, he turned to me, "What do you make of that fellow, Parker?"

"I have never seen the like," I replied. "Parsimonious, suspicious, and, I suspect, not nearly as poor as he would have us believe."

"Capital! Capital! It is all too human for the rich to affect poverty, and the poor to affect wealth. We may take it that Mr. Snawley is not poor. If he has a corner house and room enough for someone to walk from one end of the property, around the corner, to the other, we may assume that Mr. Snawley's 'bit of land,' as he puts it, is appreciably more than what the average individual would take for a 'bit.' "

He was getting into his greatcoat as he spoke, and I got into mine. As I reached for my bowler, he clapped his deerstalker to his head and we were off down the stairs to where our equipage waited at the kerb.

Snawley ushered me into the cab.

Behind me, Pons paused briefly to ask, "How long does this fellow stay on his beat?"

"Two, three hours a night. Rain, fog, or shine. And now, with Christmas almost upon us, he has brought along some bells to ring. It is maddening, sir, maddening," said our client explosively.

Pons got in, Snawley closed the door and mounted to the box, and we were off toward the Edgware Road, and from there to Lambeth and Brixton and Dulwich, seeing always before us, from every clear vantage point, the dome of the Crystal Palace, and at every hand the colour and gaiety of the season. Yellow light streamed from the shops into the falling snow, tinsel and glass globes aglow with red and green and other colours shone bright, decorations framed the shop windows, holly and mistletoe hung in sprays and bunches here and there. Coster's barrows offered fruit and vegetables, Christmas trees, fish and meat, books, cheap china, carpets. Street-sellers stood here and there with trays hung from their necks, shouting their wares—Christmas novelties, balloons, tricks, bon-bons, comic-papers, and praising the virtues of *Old Moore's Almanack*. At the poultry shops turkeys, geese, and game hung to entice the late shoppers, for it was the day before Christmas Eve, only a trifle more than two years after the ending of the great conflict, and all London celebrated its freedom from the austerities of wartime. The dancing snowflakes reflected the colours of the

shops—sometimes red, sometimes yellow or pink or blue or even pale green—and made great halos around the street-lamps.

Snawley avoided crowded thoroughfares as much as possible, and drove with considerable skill; but wherever we went, people turned on the street to look at the hansom cab as it went by—whether they were children or strollers, policemen on their rounds or shoppers with fowl or puddings in their baskets—startled at sight of this apparition from the past.

## II.

Our destination proved to be Upper Norwood.

Ebenezer Snawley's home was an asymmetric Jacobean pile, dominated by a small tower, and with Elizabethan bay windows that faced the street. It rose in the midst of a small park that occupied a corner-site and spread over a considerable portion of the two streets. A dim glow shone through the sidelights at the door; there was no other light inside. The entire neighbourhood had an air of decayed gentility, but the falling snow and the gathering darkness sufficiently diminished the glow of the street-lamp so that it was not until we had descended from the cab, which had driven in along one side of the property, bound for a small coach house at the rear—directly opposite the street-corner—and walked to the door of the house that it became evident how much the mansion, too, had decayed for want of adequate care, though it was of mid-Victorian origin, and not, therefore, an ancient building—little more than half a century old.

Leaving his steed to stand in the driveway, where the patient animal stood with its head lowered in resignation born of long experience, our client forged ahead of us to the entrance to his home, and there raised his cane and made such a clatter on the door as might have awakened the neighbourhood, had it slept, at the same time raising his voice petulantly to shout, "Pip! Pip! Pip Scratch! Up and about!"

There was a scurrying beyond the door, the sound of a bar being lifted, a key in the lock, and the portal swung open, to reveal there holding aloft a cluster of three candles a man of medium height, clad in tight broadcloth black breeches and black stockings, and a sort of green-black jacket from the sleeves of which lace cuffs depended. He wore buckled shoes on his feet. He was stooped and wore on his thin face an expression of dubiety and resignation that

had been there long enough to have become engraved upon his features. His watery blue eyes looked anxiously out, until he recognized his master; then he stepped aside with alacrity, and held the candles higher still, so as to light our way into the shadowed hall.

"No songs yet, Pip? Eh? Speak up."

"None, sir."

"Well, he will come, he will come," promised our client, striding past his man. "Lay a fire in the study, and we will sit by it and watch. Come along, gentlemen, come along. We shall have a fire by and by, to warm our bones—and perhaps a wee drop of sherry."

Pip Scratch stepped forward with a springy gait and thrust the light of the candles ahead, making the shadows to dance in the study whither our client led us. He put the candelabrum up on the wall, and backed away before Snawley's command.

"Light up, Pip, light up." And to us, "Sit down, gentlemen." And to Pip Scratch's retreating back, "And a few drops of sherry. Bring—yes, yes, bring the Amontillado. It is as much as I can do for my guests."

The servant had vanished into the darkness outside the study. I was now accustomed to the light, and saw that it was lined with books from floor to ceiling on three walls, excepting only that facing the street along which we had just come, for this wall consisted of the two Elizabethan bay windows we had seen from outside, each of them flanking the fireplace. Most of the shelves of books were encased; their glass doors reflected the flickering candles.

"He will be back in a moment or two," our client assured us.

Hard upon his words came Pip Scratch, carrying a seven-branched candelabrum and a salver on which was a bottle of Amontillado with scarcely enough sherry in it to more than half fill the three glasses beside it. He bore these things to an elegant table and put them down, then scurried to the bracket on the wall for a candle with which to light those in the candelabrum, and, having accomplished this in the dour silence with which his master now regarded him, poured the sherry, which, true to my estimate, came only to half way in each of the three glasses—but this, clearly, was approved by Mr. Snawley, for his expression softened a trifle. This done, Pip Scratch hurried from the room.

"Drink up, gentlemen," said our client, with an air rather of regret at seeing his good wine vanish. "Let us drink to our success!"

"Whatever that may be," said Pons enigmatically, raising his glass.

Down went the sherry, a swallow at a time, rolled on the tongue—and a fine sherry it proved to be, for all that there was so little of it, and while we drank, Pip Scratch came in again and laid the fire and scurried out once more, and soon the dark study looked quite cheerful, with the flames growing and leaping higher and higher, and showing row after row of books, and a locked case with folders and envelopes and boxes in it, a light bright enough so that many of the titles of the books could be seen—and most of them were by Dickens—various editions, first and later, English and foreign, and associational items.

"And these are your valuables, I take it, Mr. Snawley," said Pons.

"I own the finest collection of Dickens in London," said our client. After another sip of wine, he added, "In all England." And after two more sips, "If I may say so, I believe it to be the best in the world." Then his smile faded abruptly, his face darkened, and he added, "There is another collector who claims to have a better—but it is a lie, sir, a dastardly lie, for he cannot substantiate his claim."

"You have seen his collection?" asked Pons.

"Not I. Nor he mine."

"Do you know him?"

"No, nor wish to. He wrote me three times in as little as ten days. I have one of his letters here."

He pulled open a drawer in the table, reached in, and took out a sheet of plain paper with a few lines scrawled upon it. He handed it to Pons, and I leaned over to read it, too.

"MR. EBENEZER SNAWLEY

"Dear Sir,

"I take my pen in hand for the third time to ask the liberty of viewing your collection of Dickens which, I am told, may be equal to my own. Pray set a date, and I will be happy to accommodate myself to it. I am sir, gratefully yours,

"MICAH AUBER"

"Dated two months ago, I see," said Pons.

"I have not answered him. I doubt I would have done so had he sent a stamp and envelope for that purpose. In his case, stamps are too dear."

He drank the last of his sherry, and at that moment Pip Scratch came in again, and stood there wordlessly pointing to the street.

"Aha!" cried our client. "The fellow is back. A pox on him! Pip, remove the light for the nonce. There is too much of it—it reflects on the panes. We shall have as good a look at him as we can."

Out went the light, leaving the study lit only by the flames on the hearth, which threw the glow away from the bay windows, toward which our client was now walking, Pons at his heels, and I behind.

"There he is!" cried Snawley. "The rascal! The scoundrell!"

We could hear him now, jingling his bells, and singing in a lusty voice which was not, indeed, very musical - quite the opposite. Singing was not what I would have called it; he was, rather, bawling lustily.

"Walnuts again!" cried our client in disgust.

We could see the fellow now—a short man, stout, who, when he came under the street-lamp, revealed himself to be as much of an individualist as Snawley, for he wore buskins and short trousers, and a coat that reached scarcely to his waist, and his head was crowned with an absurd hat on which a considerable amount of snow had already collected. He carried a basket, presumably for his walnuts.

Past the light he went, bawling about his walnuts, and around the corner.

"Now, you will see, gentlemen, he goes only to the line of my property, and then back. So it is for my benefit that he is about this buffoonery."

"Or his," said Pons.

"How do you say that?" asked Snawley, bending toward Pons so that his slightly curved hawk-like nose almost touched my companion.

"In all seriousness," said Pons. "It does not come from the sherry."

"It cannot be to his benefit," answered our client, "for I have not bought so much as a walnut. Nor shall I!"

Pons stood deep in thought, watching the street-singer, fingering the lobe of his left ear, as was his custom when preoccupied. Now that all of us were silent, the voice came clear despite the muffling snow.

"He will keep that up for hours," cried our host, his dark face ruddy in the glow of the fire. "Am I to have no peace? The police will do nothing. Nothing! Do we not pay their salaries? Of course, we do. Am I to tolerate this botheration and sit helpless by while that fellow out there bawls his wares?"

"You saw how he was dressed?" inquired Pons.

"He is not in the fashion," replied Snawley, with a great deal of sniffing.

I suppressed my laughter, for the man in the street was no more out of the fashion than our client.

"I have seen enough of him for the time being," said Pons.

Snawley immediately turned and called out. "Pip! Pip! Bring the lights!"

And Pip Scratch, as if he had been waiting in the wings, immediately came hurrying into the room with the candelabrum he had taken out at his employer's command, set it down once more on the table, and departed.

"Mr. Snawley," said Pons as we sat down again near the table, Pons half-turned so that he could still look out on occasion through the bay windows toward the street-lamp, "I take it you are constantly adding to your collection?"

"Very cautiously, sir—*ve-ry* cautiously. I have so much now I scarcely know where to house it. There is very little—*ve-ry* little I do not have. Why, I doubt that I add two or three items a year."

"What was your last acquisition, Mr. Snawley?"

Once again our client's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Why do you ask that, Mr. Pons?"

"Because I wish to know."

Snawley bent toward Pons and said in a voice that was unusually soft for him, almost as with affection, "It is the most precious of all the items in my collection. It is a manuscript in Dickens's hand!"

"May I see it?"

Our client got up, pulled out of his pocket a key-ring, and walked toward the locked cabinet I had previously noticed. He unlocked it and took from it a box that appeared to be of ebony, inlaid with ivory, and brought it back to the table. He unlocked this, in turn, and took from it the manuscript in a folder. He laid it before Pons almost with reverence, and stood back to watch Pons with the particular pride of possession that invariably animates the collector.

Pons turned back the cover.

The manuscript was yellowed, as with age, but the paper was obviously of good quality. *Master Humphrey's Clock* was written at the top, and the signature of Charles Dickens meticulously below it, and below that, in the same script, began the text of the manuscript, which consisted of at least a dozen pages.



"Ah, it is a portion of *The Old Curiosity Shop* not used in the published versions of that book," said Pons.

"You know it, sir!" cried our client with evident delight.

"Indeed, I do. And I recognize the script."

"You do?" Snawley rubbed his hands together in his pleasure.

"Where did you acquire it?"

Snawley blinked at him. "It was offered to me by a gentleman who had fallen on evil days and needed the money—a trifle over a month and a half ago."

"Indeed," said Pons. "So you got it at a bargain?"

"I did, I did. The circumstances made it possible. He was desperate. He wanted five hundred pounds—a ridiculous figure."

"I see. You beat him down?"

"Business is business, Mr. Pons. I bought it for two hundred pounds."

Pons took one of the sheets and held it up against the candles.

"Take care, sir! Take care!" said our client nervously.

Pons lowered the sheet. "You have had it authenticated?"

"Authenticated? Sir, I am an authority on Dickens. Why should I pay some 'expert' a fee to disclose what I already know? This is Dickens's handwriting. I have letters of Dickens by which to authenticate it. Not an *i* is dotted otherwise but as Dickens dotted his *i*'s, not a *t* is crossed otherwise. This is Dickens's script, word for word, letter for letter."

Offended, our client almost rudely picked up his treasure and restored it to box and cabinet. As he came back to his chair, he reminded Pons, "But you did not come here to see my collection. There is that fellow outside. How will you deal with him?"

"Ah, I propose to invite him to dinner," answered Pons. "No later than tomorrow night—Christmas Eve. Or rather, shall we put it that *you* will invite him here for dinner at that time?"

Our client's jaw dropped. "You are surely joking," he said in a strangled voice.

"It is Christmas, Mr. Snawley. We shall show him some of the spirit of the season."

"I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry," replied Snawley sourly. "Least of all that fellow out there. It is an ill-conceived and ill-timed jest."

"It is no jest, Mr. Snawley."

Pons's eyes danced in the candlelight.

"I will have none of it," said our client, coming to his feet as if to dismiss us.

"It is either that," said Pons inexorably, "or my fee."

"Name it, then! Name it—for I shall certainly not lay a board for that infernal rogue," cried our client, raising his voice.

"Five hundred pounds," said Pons coldly.

"Five hundred pounds!" screamed Snawley.

Pons nodded, folded his arms across his chest, and looked as adamant as a rock.

Our client leaned and caught hold of the table as if he were about to fall. "Five hundred pounds!" he whispered. "It is robbery! Five hundred pounds!" He stood for a minute so, Pons unmoved the while, and presently a crafty expression came into his narrowed eyes. He began to work his lips out and in, as was his habit, and he turned his head to look directly at Pons. "You say," he said, still in a whisper, "it is either five hundred pounds or—a dinner. . . ."

"For four. The three of us and that lusty bawler out there," said Pons.

"It *would* be less expensive," agreed our client, licking his lips.

"Considerably. Particularly since I myself will supply the goose," said Pons with the utmost *savoir faire*.

"Done!" cried Snawley at once, as if he had suddenly got much the better of a bad bargain. "Done!" He drew back. "But since I have retained you, I leave it to you to invite him—for I will not!"

"Dinner at seven, Mr. Snawley?"

Our client nodded briskly. "As you like."

"I will send around the goose in the morning."

"There is no other fee, Mr. Pons? I have heard you a-right? And you will dispose of that fellow out there?" He inclined his head toward the street.

"I daresay he will not trouble you after tomorrow night," said Pons.

"Then, since there is no further fee, you will not take it amiss if I do not drive you back? There is an underground nearby."

"We will take it, Mr. Snawley."

Snawley saw us to the door, the candelabrum in his hand. At the threshold Pons paused.

"There must be nothing spared at dinner, Mr. Snawley," he said. "We'll want potatoes, dressing, vegetables, fruit, green salad, plum pudding—and a trifle more of the Amontillado."

Our client sighed with resignation. "It will be done, though I may rue it."

"Rue it you may," said Pons cheerfully. "Good-night, sir. And the appropriate greetings of the season to you."

"Humbug! All humbug!" muttered our client, retreating into his house.

We went down the walk through the now much thinned snowfall, and stood at its juncture with the street until the object of our client's ire came around again. He was a stocky man with a good paunch on him, cherry-red cheeks and a nose of darker red, and merry little eyes that looked out of two rolls of fat, as it were. Coming close, he affected not to see us, until Pons strode out into his path, silencing his bawling of walnuts.

"Good-evening, Mr. Auber."

He started back, peering at Pons. "I don't know ye, sir," he said.

"But it *is* Mr. Auber, isn't it? Mr. Micah Auber?"

Auber nodded hesitantly.

"Mr. Ebenezer Snawley would like your company at dinner tomorrow night at seven."

For a long moment, mouth agape, Auber stared at him. "God bless my soul!" he said, finding his voice. "Did he know me, then?"

"No," said Pons, "But who else would be walking here affecting to be a hawker of such wares if not Micah Auber, on hand in case anything turned up?"

"God bless my soul!" said Auber again, fervently.

"You will meet us at the door, Mr. Auber, and go in with us," said Pons. "Good-evening, sir."

"I will be there," said Auber.

"And leave off this bawling," said Pons over his shoulder.

We passed on down the street, and Auber, I saw, looking back, went scuttling off in the other direction, in silence.

We hurried on through the snow. The evening was mellow enough so that much of it underfoot had melted, and the falling flakes dissolved on our clothing. But Pons set the pace, and it was not until we were in the underground on the way back to our quarters, that I had opportunity to speak.

"How did you know that fellow was Micah Auber?" I asked.

"Why, that is as elementary a deduction as it seems to me possible to make," replied Pons. "Consider—Snawley's valuables consist of his collection, which is primarily of Dickensiana. Our client acquired his most recent treasure a trifle over six weeks ago. Within a

fortnight thereafter Micah Auber writes, asking to see his collection. Having had no reply, and assessing our client's character correctly by inquiry or observation—perhaps both—Auber has adopted this novel method of attracting his attention. His object is clearly to get inside that house and have a look at our client's collection."

"But surely this is all very roundabout," I cried.

"I fancy Snawley himself is rather roundabout—though not so roundabout as Auber. They are two of a kind. You know my opinion of collectors. They are all a trifle mad, some more so than others. This pair is surely unique, even to the dress of the period!"

"How could Auber know that Snawley had acquired that manuscript?"

"I fancy it is for the reason that Snawley has laid claim to possession of the largest Dickens collection in London. . . ."

"In the world," I put in.

"And because the manuscript was undoubtedly stolen from Auber's collection," finished Pons. "Hence Auber's persistence. We shall have a delightful dinner tomorrow evening, I fancy."

### III.

Pons spent some time next day looking through references and making a telephone call or two, but he was not long occupied at this, and went about looking forward to dinner that evening, and from time to time throughout the day hummed a few bars of a tune, something to which he was not much given, and which testified to the warmth of his anticipation.

We set out early, and reached Ebenezer Snawley's home at a quarter to seven, but Micah Auber had preceded us to the vicinity; for we had no sooner posted ourselves before Snawley's door than Auber made his appearance, bearing in upon us from among a little group of yew trees off to one side of the driveway, where he had undoubtedly been standing to wait upon our coming. He approached with a skip and a hop, and came up to us a little short of breath. Though he was dressed for dinner, it was possible to see by the light of the moon, which lacked but one day of being full, that his clothing was as ancient as our client's.

"Ah, good-evening, Mr. Auber," Pons greeted him. "I am happy to observe that you are in time for what I trust will be a good dinner."

"I don't know as to how good it will be. Old Snawley's tight, mighty tight," said Auber.

Pons chuckled.

"But, I don't believe, sir, we've been properly interduced."

"We have not," said Pons. "My companion is Dr. Lyndon Parker, and I am Solar Pons."

Auber acknowledged both introductions with a sweeping bow, then brought himself up short. "Solar Pons, did ye say?" He savoured the name, cocked an eye at Pons, and added, "I have a knowledge of London ye might say is extensive and peculiar. I've heard the name. Give me a moment—it'll come to me. Ah, yes, the detective. Well, well, we are well met, sir. I have a need for your services, indeed I do. I've had stolen from me a val'able manuscript—and I have reason to believe our host has it. A prize, sir, a prize. A rare prize."

"We shall see, Mr. Auber, we shall see," said Pons.

"I will pay a reasonable sum, sir, for its recovery—a reasonable sum."

Pons seized hold of the knocker and rapped it sharply against the door. Almost at once our client's voice rose.

"Pip! Pip! The door! The gentlemen are here."

We could hear Pip Scratch coming down the hall, and then the door was thrown open. The only concession Pip had made to the occasion was a branch of seven candles instead of three.

"A Merry Christmas to you, Pip," said Pons.

"Thank you, sir. And to you, gentlemen," said Pip in a scarcely audible whisper, as if he feared his master might hear him say it.

"Come in! Come in! Let us have done with it," called our client from the study.

The table was laid in the study, and the wine-glasses were filled to the brim. Snawley stood at its head, frock-coated, and wearing a broad black tie with a pin in it at the neck, though he was as grizzled as ever, and his eyes seemed to be even more narrowed as he looked past Pons toward Auber with no attempt to conceal his distaste.

"Mr. Snawley," said Pons with a wave of his hand toward Auber, "let me introduce our lusty-voiced friend."

"A voice not meant for singing," put in our client.

"Mr. Auber," finished Pons.

Snawley started back as if he had been struck. "Micah Auber?" he cried.

"The same," said Auber, bowing, his bald head gleaming in the candlelight, and all in the same movement producing a monocle on a thin black cord, which he raised to one eye and looked through at our client, who was still so thunderstruck that he was incapable of speech. "Ye do me the honour to ask me to dine."

All Snawley could think to say in this contretemps was, "To save five hundred pounds!"

"As good a reason as any," said Auber urbanely.

At this juncture Pip Scratch made his appearance, bearing a large platter on which rested the goose Pons had had sent over that morning, all steaming and brown and done to a turn. He lowered it to the table and set about at once to carve it, while our host, recovering himself, though with as sour an expression as he could put on his face, waved us to our seats.

Pons seized his glass of Amontillado and raised it aloft. "Let us drink to the success of your various enterprises!"

"Done," said Auber.

"And to a Merry Christmas!" continued Pons.

"Humbug!" cried Snawley.

"I would not say so, Mr. Snawley," said Auber. "Christmas is a very useful occasion."

"Useful?" echoed our client. "And for whom, pray?"

"Why, for us all," answered Auber with spirit. "It is a season of forbearance, perseverance, and usefulness."

"Humbug!" said Snawley again. "If I had my way, I should have every Christmas merrymaker boiled in his own pudding!"

"Ye need a bit more sherry, Mr. Snawley. Come, man, this dinner cannot have cost ye that much!"

So it went through that Christmas Eve dinner, with the two collectors exchanging hard words, and then less hard words, and then softer words, mellowed by the wine for which Pons kept calling. The goose was disposed of in large part, and the dressing, and the potatoes, the carrots, the fruit, the green salad—all in good time, and slowly—and finally came the plum pudding, brought flaming to the table; while the hours went by, eight o'clock struck, then nine—and it was ten before we sat there at coffee and brandy, and by this time both Snawley and Auber were mellow, and Pip Scratch, who had cleared the table of all but the coffee cups and liqueur glasses, had come in to sit down away a little from the table, but yet a party to what went on there.

And it was then that Auber, calculating that the time was right

for it, turned to our client and said, "And now, if ye'd no' mind, I'd like a look at your collection of Dickens, Mr. Snawley."

"I daresay you would," said Snawley. "I have the largest such in the world."

"It is you who says it."

"I wait to hear you say it, too!"

Auber smiled and half closed his eyes. "If it is all that matters to ye, I will agree to it."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Snawley, and got a little unsteadily to his feet, and went over to his shelves, followed like a shadow by the faithful Pip, and with Auber's eyes on him as if he feared that Snawley and his collection might escape him after all.

Snawley unlocked his cabinet and handed Pip a book or two, and carried another himself. They brought them to the table, and Snawley took one after the other of them and laid them down lovingly. They were inscribed copies of *David Copperfield*, *Edwin Drood*, and *The Pickwick Papers*. After Auber had fittingly admired and exclaimed over them, our client went back for more, and returned this time with copies of *The Monthly Magazine* containing *Sketches by Boz*, with interlineations in Dickens's hand.

Pip kept the fire going on the hearth, and between this task and dancing attendance upon his master, he was continually occupied, going back and forth, to and fro, with the firelight flickering on his bony face and hands, and the candle flames leaping up and dying away to fill the room with grotesque shadows, as the four of us bent over one treasure after another, and the clock crept around from ten to eleven, and moved upon midnight. A parade of books and papers moved from the cabinet to the table and back to the cabinet again—letters in Dickens's hand, letters to Dickens from his publishers, old drawings by Cruikshank and "Phiz" of Dickens's characters—Oliver Twist, Fagin, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Mr. Bumble, Little Amy Dorrit, Uriah Heep, Caroline Jellyby, Seth Pecksniff, Sam Weller, Samuel Pickwick, and many another—so that it was late when at last Snawley came to his recently acquired treasure, and brought this too to the table.

"And this, Mr. Auber, is the crown jewel, you might say, of my collection," he said.

He made to turn back the cover, but Auber suddenly put forth a hand and held the cover down. Snawley started back a little, but did not take his own hands from his prized manuscript.

"Let me tell ye what it is, Mr. Snawley," said Auber. "It is a manuscript in Dickens's hand—a part of that greater work known as *Master Humphrey's Clock*, and specifically that portion of it which became *The Old Curiosity Shop*. But this portion of it was deleted from the book. It is a manuscript of fourteen and a half pages, with Dickens's signature beneath the title on the first page."

Snawley regarded him with wide, alarmed eyes. "How can you know this, Mr. Auber?"

"Because it was stolen from me two months ago."

A cry of rage escaped Snawley. He pulled the precious manuscript away from Auber's restraining hand.

"It is mine!" he cried. "I bought it!"

"For how much?"

"Two hundred pounds."

"The precise sum I paid for it a year ago."

"You shall not have it," cried Snawley.

"I mean to have it," said Auber, springing up.

Pons, too, came to his feet. "Pray, gentlemen, one moment. You will allow, I think, that I should have a few words in this matter. Permit me to have that manuscript for a few minutes, Mr. Snawley."

"On condition it comes back to my hand, sir!"

"That is a condition easy for me to grant, but one the fulfilment of which you may not so readily demand."

"This fellow speaks in riddles," said Snawley testily, as he handed the manuscript to Pons.

Pons took it, opened the cover, and picked up the first page of the manuscript, that with the signature of Dickens on it. He handed it back to Snawley.

"Pray hold it up to the light and describe the watermark, Mr. Snawley."

Our client held it before the candles. After studying it for a few moments he said hesitantly, "Why, I believe it is a rose on a stem, sir."

"Is that all, Mr. Snawley?"

"No, no, I see now there are three letters, very small, at the base of the stem—*KTC*."

Pons held out his hand for the page, and took up another. This one he handed to Auber. "Examine it, Mr. Auber."

Auber in turn held it up to the candles. "Yes, ye've made no



mistake, Mr. Snawley. It is a rose, delicately done—a fine rose. And the letters are clear—*KTC*, all run together.”

“That is the watermark of Kennaway, Teape & Company, in Aldgate,” said Pons.

“I know of them,” said Snawley. “A highly reputable firm.”

“They were established in 1871,” continued Pons. “Mr. Dickens died on June 9th, 1870.”

For a moment of frozen horror for the collectors there was not a sound.

“It cannot be!” cried our client then.

“Ye cannot mean it!” echoed Auber.

“The watermark cannot lie, gentlemen,” said Pons dryly, “but alas! the script can.”

“I bought it in good faith,” said Auber, aghast.

“And had it stolen in good faith,” said Pons, chuckling.

“I bought it from a reputable dealer,” said Auber.

“From the shop of Jason Brompton, in the Edgware Road,” said Pons. “But not from him—rather from his assistant.”

Auber gazed at Pons in astonishment. “How did ye know?”

“Because there is only one forger in London with the skill and patience to have wrought this manuscript,” said Pons. “His name is Dennis Golders.”

“I will charge him!” cried Auber.

“Ah, I fear that cannot be done. Mr. Golders left Brompton’s last January, and is now in His Majesty’s service. I shall see, nevertheless, what I can do in the matter, but do not count on my success.”

Snawley fell back into his chair.

Auber did likewise.

Pip Scratch came quietly forward and poured them both a little sherry.

Midnight struck.

“It is Christmas Day, gentlemen,” said Pons. “It is time to leave you. Now you have had a sad blow in common, perhaps you may find something to give you mutual pleasure in all these shelves! Even collectors must take the fraudulent with the genuine.”

Snawley raised his head. “You are right, Mr. Pons. Pip! Pip!” he shouted, as if Pip Scratch were not standing behind him. “Put on your coat and bring out the cab. Drive the gentlemen home!”

Our client and his visitor accompanied us to the door and saw us

into the hansom cab Pip Scratch had brought down the driveway from the coach house.

"Merry Christmas, gentlemen!" cried Pons, leaning out.

"It burns my lips," said Snawley with a wry smile. "But I will say it."

He wished us both a Merry Christmas, and then, arm in arm, the two collectors turned and went a trifle unsteadily back into the house.

"This has been a rare Christmas, Parker, a rare Christmas, indeed," mused Pons, as we drove toward our quarters through the dark London streets in our client's hansom cab.

"I doubt we'll ever see its like again," I agreed.

"Do not deny us hope, Parker," replied Pons. He cocked his head in my direction and looked at me quizzically. "Did I not see you eyeing the clock with some apprehension in the course of the past half hour?"

"You did, indeed," I admitted. "I feared—I had the conviction, indeed I did—that the three of them would vanish at the stroke of midnight!"

## *The Adventure of the Haunted Library*

WHEN I OPENED the door of our lodgings one summer day during the third year of our joint tenancy of No. 7B, Praed Street, I found my friend Solar Pons standing with one arm on the mantel, waiting with a thin edge of impatience either upon my arrival, or that of someone else, and ready to go out, for his deerstalker lay close by.

"You're just in time, Parker," he said, "—if the inclination moves you—to join me in another of my little inquiries. This time, evidently into the supernatural."

"The supernatural!" I exclaimed, depositing my bag.

"So it would seem." He pointed to a letter thrown carelessly upon the table.

I picked it up and was immediately aware of the fine quality of the paper and the embossed name: Mrs. Margaret Ashcroft. Her communication was brief.

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"I should be extremely obliged if you could see your way clear to call upon me some time later today or tomorrow, at your convenience, to investigate a troublesome matter which hardly seems to be within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police. I do believe the library is haunted. Mr. Carnacki says it is not, but I can hardly doubt the evidence of my own senses."

Her signature was followed by a Sydenham address.

"I've sent for a cab," said Pons.

"Who is Mr. Carnacki?" I asked.

"A self-styled psychic investigator. He lives in Chelsea, and has had some considerable success, I am told."

"A charlatan!"

"If he were, he would hardly have turned down our client. What do you make of it, Parker? You know my methods."

I studied the letter which I still held, while Pons waited to hear how much I had learned from his spontaneous and frequent lectures in ratiocination. "If the quality of the paper is any indication, the lady is not without means," I said.

"Capital!"

"Unless she is an heiress, she is probably of middle age or over."

"Go on," urged Pons, smiling.

"She is upset because, though she begins well, she rapidly becomes very unclear."

"And provocative," said Pons. "Who could resist a ghost in a library, eh?"

"But what do you make of it?" I pressed him.

"Well, much the same as you," he said generously. "But I rather think the lady is not a young heiress. She would hardly be living in Sydenham, if she were. No, I think we shall find that she recently acquired a house there and has not been in residence very long. Something is wrong with the library."

"Pons, you don't seriously think it's haunted?"

"Do you believe in ghosts, Parker?"

"Certainly not!"

"Do I detect the slightest hesitation in your answer?" He chuckled. "Ought we not to say, rather, we believe there are certain phenomena which science as yet has not correctly explained or interpreted?" He raised his head suddenly, listening. "I believe that is our cab drawing to the kerb."

A moment later, the sound of a horn from below verified Pons's deduction.

Pons clapped his deerstalker to his head and we were off.

Our client's house was built of brick, three storeys in height, with dormers on the gable floor. It was large and spreading, and built on a knoll, partly into the slope of the earth, though it seemed at first glance to crown the rise there. It was plainly of late Victorian construction, and, while it was not shabby, it just escaped looking quite genteel. Adjacent houses were not quite far enough away from it to give the lawn and garden the kind of spaciousness required to set the house off to its best advantage in a neighbourhood which was slowly declining from its former status.

Our client received us in the library. Mrs. Ashcroft was a slender, diminutive woman with flashing blue eyes and whitening hair. She wore an air of fixed determination which her smile at the sight of Pons did not diminish.

"Mr. Pons, I was confident that you would come," she greeted us.

She acknowledged Pons's introduction of me courteously, and went on, "This is the haunted room."

"Let us just hear your account of what has happened from the

beginning, Mrs. Ashcroft," suggested Pons.

"Very well." She sat for a moment trying to decide where to begin her narrative. "I suppose, Mr. Pons, it began about a month ago. Mrs. Jenkins, a housekeeper I had engaged, was cleaning late in the library when she heard someone singing. It seemed to come, she said, 'from the books.' Something about a 'dead man.' It faded away. Two nights later she woke after a dream and went downstairs to get a sedative from the medicine cabinet. She heard something in the library. She thought perhaps I was indisposed and went to the library. But the room, of course, was dark. However, there was a shaft of moonlight in the room—it was bright outside, and therefore a kind of illumination was in the library, too—and in that shaft, Mr. Pons, Mrs. Jenkins believed she saw the bearded face of an old man that seemed to glare fiercely at her. It was only for a moment. Then Mrs. Jenkins found the switch and turned up the light. Of course, there was no one in the library but she. It was enough for her; she was so sure that she had seen a ghost, that next morning, after all the windows and doors were found locked and bolted, she gave notice. I was not entirely sorry to see them go—her husband worked as gardener—because I suspected Jenkins of taking food from the cellars and the refrigerator for their married daughter. That is not an uncommon problem with servants in England, I am told."

"I should have thought you a native, Mrs. Ashcroft," said Pons. "You've been in the Colonies?"

"Kenya, yes. But I was born here. It was for reasons of sentiment that I took this house. I should have chosen a better district. But I was extremely poor in Sydenham as a child, and somehow the houses here represented the epitome of splendour. When the agent notified me that this one was to be sold, I couldn't resist taking it. But the tables are turned—the houses have come down in the world and I have come up, and there are so many things I miss—the hawkers and the carts, for which cars are no substitute, the rumble of the trains since the Nunhead-Crystal Palace Line has been discontinued, and all in all, I fear my sentiments have led me to make an ill-advised choice. The ghost, of course, is only the crowning touch."

"You believe in him then, Mrs. Ashcroft?"

"I've seen him, Mr. Pons." She spoke as matter-of-factly as if she were speaking of some casual natural phenomenon. "It was a week ago. I wasn't entirely satisfied that Mrs. Jenkins had not seen

something. It could have been a hallucination. If she had started awake from a dream and fancied she saw something in their room why, yes, I could easily have believed it a transitory hallucination, which might occur commonly enough after a dream. But Mrs. Jenkins had been awake enough to walk downstairs, take a sedative, and start back up when she heard something in the library. So the dream had had time enough in which to wear off. I am myself not easily frightened. My late husband and I lived in Kenya, and some of the Kikuyu were unfriendly.

"Mr. Pons, I examined the library carefully. As you see, shelving covers most of the walls. I had very few personal books to add—the rest were here. I bought the house fully furnished, as the former owner had died and there were no near heirs. That is, there was a brother, I understand, but he was in Rhodesia, and had no intention of returning to England. He put the house up for sale, and my agents, Messrs. Harwell and Chamberlin, in Lordship Lane, secured it for me. The books are therefore the property of the former owner, a Mr. Howard Brensham, who appears to have been very widely read, for there are collections ranging from early British poetry to crime and detective fiction. But that is hardly pertinent. My own books occupy scarcely two shelves over there—all but a few have dust-jackets, as you see, Mr. Pons. Well, my examination of the library indicated that the position of these books as I had placed them had been altered. It seemed to me that they had been handled, perhaps even read. They are not of any great consequence—recent novels, some work by Proust and Mauriac in French editions, an account of life in Kenya, and the like. It was possible that one of the servants had become interested in them; I did not inquire. Nevertheless, I became very sensitive and alert about the library. One night last week—Thursday, I believe—while I lay reading late, in my room, I distinctly heard a book or some such object fall in this room.

"I got out of bed, took my torch, and crept down the stairs in the dark. Mr. Pons, I sensed someone's or something's moving about below. I could feel the disturbance of the air at the foot of the stairs where something had passed. I went directly to the library and from the threshold of that door over there I turned my torch into the room and put on its light. Mr. Pons, I saw a horrifying thing. I saw the face of an old man with a matted beard and with wild unkempt hair starting outward from his head; it glared fiercely, menacingly at me. I admit that I faltered and fell back; the torch almost fell

from my hands. Nevertheless, I summoned enough courage to snap on the overhead light. Mr. Pons—there was no one in the room beside myself. I stood in the doorway. No one had passed me. Yet, I swear it, I had seen precisely the same apparition that Mrs. Jenkins had described! It was there for one second—in the next it was gone—as if the very books had swallowed it up.

"Mr. Pons, I am not an imaginative woman, and I am not given to hallucinations. I saw what I had seen; there was no question of that. I went around at once to make certain that the windows and doors were locked; all were; nothing had been tampered with. I had seen something, and everything about it suggested a supernatural apparition. I applied to Mr. Harwell. He told me that Mr. Brensham had never made any reference to anything out of the ordinary about the house. He had personally known Mr. Brensham's old uncle, Captain Jason Brensham, from whom he had inherited the house, and the Captain had never once complained of the house. He admitted that it did not seem to be a matter for the regular police, and mentioned Mr. Carnacki as well as yourself. I'm sure you know Mr. Carnacki, whose forte is psychic investigation. He came—and as nearly as I can describe it, he *felt* the library, and assured me that there were no supernatural forces at work here. So I applied to you, Mr. Pons, and I do hope you will lay the ghost for me."

Pons smiled almost benignly, which lent his handsome, feral face a briefly gargoyle-like expression. "My modest powers, I fear, do not permit me to feel the presence of the supernatural, but I must admit to some interest in your little problem," he said thoughtfully. "Let me ask you, on the occasion on which you saw the apparition—last Thursday—were you aware of anyone's breathing?"

"No, Mr. Pons. I don't believe ghosts are held to breathe."

"Ah, Mrs. Ashcroft, in such matters I must defer to your judgment—you appear to have seen a ghost; I have not seen one." His eyes danced. "Let us concentrate for a moment on its disappearance. Was it accompanied by any sound?"

Our client sat for a long moment in deep thought. "I believe it was, Mr. Pons," she said at last. "Now that I think of it."

"Can you describe it?"

"As best I can recall, it was something like the sound a book dropped on the carpet might make."

"But there was no book on the floor when you turned the light on?"

"I do not remember that there was."

"Will you show me approximately where the spectre was when you saw it?"

She got up with alacrity, crossed to her right, and stood next to the shelving there. She was in a position almost directly across from the entrance to the library from the adjacent room; a light flashed on from the threshold would almost certainly strike the shelving there.

"You see, Mr. Pons—there isn't even a window in this wall through which someone could have escaped if it were unlocked."

"Yes, yes," said Pons with an absent air. "Some ghosts vanish without sound, we are told, and some in a thunderclap. And this one with the sound of a book dropped upon the carpet!" He sat for a few moments, eyes closed, his long, tapering fingers tented before him, touching his chin occasionally. He opened his eyes again and asked, "Has anything in the house—other than your books—been disturbed, Mrs. Ashcroft?"

"If you mean my jewelry or the silver—no, Mr. Pons."

"A ghost with a taste for literature! There are indeed all things under the sun. The library has of course been cleaned since the visitation?"

"Every Saturday, Mr. Pons."

"Today is Thursday—a week since your experience. Has anything taken place since then, Mrs. Ashcroft?"

"Nothing, Mr. Pons."

"If you will excuse me," he said, coming to his feet, "I would like to examine the room."

Thereupon he began that process of intensive examination which never ceased to amaze and amuse me. He took the position that our client had just left to return to her chair, and stood, I guessed, fixing directions. He gazed at the high windows along the south wall; I concluded that he was estimating the angle of a shaft of moonlight and deducing that the ghost, as seen by Mrs. Jenkins, had been standing at or near the same place when it was observed. Having satisfied himself, he gave his attention to the floor, first squatting there, then coming to his knees and crawling about. Now and then he picked something off the carpet and put it into one of the tiny envelopes he habitually carried. He crept all along the east wall, went around the north and circled the room in this fashion, while our client watched him with singular interest, saying nothing and making no attempt to conceal her astonishment. He finished at last, and got to his feet once more, rubbing his hands together.



"Pray tell me, Mrs. Ashcroft, can you supply a length of thread of a kind that is not too tensile, that will break readily?"

"What colour, Mr. Pons?"

"Trust a lady to think of that!" he said, smiling. "Colour is of no object, but if you offer a choice, I prefer black."

"I believe so. Wait here."

Our client rose and left the library.

"Are you expecting to catch a ghost with thread, Pons?" I asked.

"Say rather I expect to test a phenomenon."

"That is one of the simplest devices I have ever known you to use."

"Is it not?" he agreed, nodding. "I submit, however, that the simple is always preferable to the complex."

Mrs. Ashcroft returned, holding out a reel of black thread. "Will this do, Mr. Pons?"

Pons took it, unwound a little of the thread, and pulled it apart readily. "Capital!" he answered. "This is adequate."

He walked swiftly over to the north wall, took a book off the third shelf, which was slightly over two feet from the floor, and tied the thread around it. Then he restored the book to its place, and walked away, unwinding the reel, until he reached the south wall, where he tautened the thread and tied the end around a book there. He now had an almost invisible thread that reached from north to south across the library at a distance of about six feet from the east wall, and within the line of the windows.

He returned the reel of thread to our client. "Now, then, can we be assured that no one will enter the library for a day or two? Perhaps the Saturday cleaning can be dispensed with?"

"Of course it can, Mr. Pons," said Mrs. Ashcroft, clearly mystified.

"Very well, Mrs. Ashcroft. I trust you will notify me at once if the thread is broken—or if any other untoward event occurs. In the meantime, there are a few little inquiries I want to make."

Our client bade us farewell with considerably more perplexity than she had displayed in her recital of the curious events which had befallen her.

Once outside, Pons looked at his watch. "I fancy we may just have time to catch Mr. Harwell at his office, which is not far down Sydenham Hill and so within walking distance." He gazed at me, his eyes twinkling. "Coming, Parker?"

I fell into step at his side, and for a few moments we walked in silence, Pons striding along with his long arms swinging loosely at his sides, his keen eyes darting here and there, as if in perpetual and merciless search of facts with which to substantiate his deductions.

I broke the silence between us. "Pons, you surely don't believe in Mrs. Ashcroft's ghost?"

"What is a ghost?" he replied. "Something seen. Not necessarily supernatural. Agreed?"

"Agreed," I said. "It may be hallucination, illusion, some natural phenomenon misinterpreted."

"So the question is not about the reality of ghosts, but, did our client see a ghost or did she not? She believes she did. We are willing to believe that she saw something. Now, it was either a ghost or it was not a ghost."

"Pure logic."

"Let us fall back upon it. Ghost or no ghost, what is its motivation?"

"I thought that plain as a pikestaff," I said dryly. "The purpose is to frighten Mrs. Ashcroft away from the house."

"I submit few such matters are plain as a pikestaff. Why?"

"Someone wishes to gain possession of the house."

"Anyone wishing to do so could surely have bought it from the agents before Mrs. Ashcroft did. But, let us for the moment assume that you are correct. How then did he get in?"

"That remains to be determined."

"Quite right. And we shall determine it. But one other little matter perplexes me in relation to your theory. That is this—if someone were bent upon frightening Mrs. Ashcroft from the house, does it not seem to you singular that we have no evidence that he initiated any of those little scenes where he was observed?"

"I should say it was deuced clever of him."

"It does not seem strange to you that if someone intended to frighten our client from the house, he should permit himself to be seen only by accident? And that after but the briefest of appearances, he should vanish before the full effectiveness of the apparition could be felt?"

"When you put it that way, of course, it is a little far-fetched."

"I fear we must abandon your theory, Parker, sound as it is in every other respect."

He stopped suddenly. "I believe this is the address we want. Ah, yes—here we are. 'Harwell & Chamberlin, 210.' "

We mounted the stairs of the ancient but durable building and found ourselves presently in late-nineteenth-century quarters. A clerk came forward at our entrance.

"Good-day, gentlemen. Can we be of service?"

"I am interested in seeing Mr. Roderic Harwell," said Pons.

"I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Harwell has just left the office for the rest of the day. Would you care to make an appointment?"

"No, thank you. My business is of some considerable urgency, and I shall have to follow him home."

The clerk hesitated momentarily, then said, "I should not think that necessary, sir. You could find him down and around the corner at the Green Horse. He likes to spend an hour or so at the pub with an old friend or two before going home. Look for a short, ruddy gentleman, with bushy white sideboards."

Pons thanked him again, and we made our way back down the stairs and out to the street. In only a few minutes we were entering the Green Horse. Despite the crowd in the bar, Pons's quick eyes immediately found the object of our search, sitting at a round table near one wall, in desultory conversation with another gentleman of similar age, close to sixty, wearing, unless I were sadly mistaken, the air of my own profession.

We made our way to the table.

"Mr. Roderic Harwell?" asked Pons.

"That infernal clerk has given me away again!" cried Harwell, but with such a jovial smile that it was clear he did not mind.

"What can I do for you?"

"Sir, you were kind enough to recommend me to Mrs. Margaret Ashcroft."

"Ah, it's Solar Pons, is it? I thought you looked familiar. Sit down, sit down."

His companion hastily rose and excused himself.

"Pray do not leave, Doctor," said Pons. "This matter is not of such a nature that you need to disturb your meeting."

Harwell introduced us all around. His companion was Dr. Horace Weston, an old friend he was in the habit of meeting at the Green Horse at the end of the day. We sat between them.

"Now, then," said Harwell when we had made ourselves comfortable. "What'll you have to drink? Some ale? Bitter?"

"Nothing at all, if you please," said Pons.

"As you like. You've been to see Mrs. Ashcroft and heard her story?"

"We have just come from there."

"Well, Mr. Pons, I never knew of anything wrong with the house," said Harwell. "We sold some land in the country for Captain Brensham when he began selling off his property so that he could live as he was accustomed to live. He was a bibliophile of a sort—books about the sea were his specialty—and he lived well. But a recluse in his last years. He timed his life right—died just about the time his funds ran out."

"And Howard Brensham?" asked Pons.

"Different sort of fellow altogether. Quiet, too, but you'd find him in the pubs, and at the cinema, sometimes watching a stage show. He gambled a little, but carefully. I gather he surprised his uncle by turning out well. He had done a turn in Borstal as a boy. And I suppose he was just as surprised when his uncle asked him to live with him his last years and left everything to him, including the generous insurance he carried."

"I wasn't sure, from what Mrs. Ashcroft said, when Howard Brensham died."

Harwell flashed a glance at his companion. "About seven weeks ago or so, eh?" To Pons, he added, "Dr. Weston was called."

"He had a cerebral thrombosis in the street, Mr. Pons," explained Dr. Weston. "Died in three hours. Very fast. Only forty-seven, and no previous history. But then, Captain Brensham died of a heart attack."

"Ah, you attended the Captain, too?"

"Well, not exactly. I had attended him for some bronchial ailments. He took good care of his voice. He liked to sing. But when he had his heart attack and died I was in France on holiday. I had a young *locum* in and he was called."

"Mrs. Ashcroft's ghost sang," said Harwell thoughtfully. "Something about a 'dead man.'"

"I would not be surprised if it were an old sea shanty," said Pons.

"You don't mean you think it may actually be the Captain's ghost, Mr. Pons?"

"Say, rather, we may be meant to think it is," answered Pons.

"How old was he when he died?"

"Sixty-eight or sixty-seven—something like that," said Dr. Weston.

"How long ago?"

"Oh, only two years."

"His nephew hadn't lived with him very long, then, before the old man died?"

"No. Only a year or so," said Harwell. His sudden grin gave him a Dickensian look. "But it was long enough to give him at least one of his uncle's enthusiasms—the sea. He's kept up all the Captain's newspapers and magazines, and was still buying books about the sea when he died. Like his uncle, he read very little else. I suppose a turn he had done as a seaman gave him that bent. But they were a sea-faring family. The Captain's father had been a seaman, too, and Richard—the brother in Rhodesia who inherited the property and sold it through us to Mrs. Ashcroft—had served six years in the India trade."

Pons sat for a few minutes in thoughtful silence. Then he said, "I take it that the property has no outstanding value."

Harwell looked suddenly unhappy. "Mr. Pons, we tried to dissuade Mrs. Ashcroft. But these Colonials have sentimental impulses no one can curb. Home to Mrs. Ashcroft meant not London, not England, but Sydenham. What could we do? The house was the best we could obtain for her in Sydenham. But it's in a declining neighbourhood, and no matter how she refurbishes it, its value is bound to go down."

Pons came abruptly to his feet. "Thank you, Mr. Harwell. And you, Dr. Weston."

We bade them good-bye and went out to find a cab.

Back in our quarters, Pons ignored the supper Mrs. Johnson had laid for us, and went directly to the corner where he kept his chemical apparatus. There he emptied his pockets of the envelopes he had filled in Mrs. Ashcroft's library, tossed his deerstalker to the top of the bookcase nearby, and began to subject his findings to chemical analysis. I ate supper by myself, knowing that it would be fruitless to urge Pons to join me. Afterwards I had a patient to look in on. I doubt that Pons heard me leave the room.

On my return in mid-evening, Pons was just finishing.

"Ah, Parker," he greeted me, "I see by the sour expression you're wearing you've been out calling on the crotchety Mr. Barnes."

"While you, I suppose, have been tracking down the identity of Mrs. Ashcroft's ghost?"

"I have turned up indisputable evidence that her visitant is from the nethermost regions," he said triumphantly, and laid before me

a tiny fragment of cinder. "Do you suppose we dare conclude that coal is burned in Hell?"

I gazed at him in open-mouthed astonishment. His eyes were dancing merrily. He was expecting an outburst of protest from me. I choked it back deliberately; I was becoming familiar indeed with all the little games he played.

"Have you determined," I said without a smile, "whether he comes from the Catholic Hell or the Protestant Hell?"

"*Touché!*" he cried, and laughed heartily.

"More to the point," I went on. "Have you determined his identity and his motive?"

"Oh, there's not much mystery in that," he said almost contemptuously. "It's the background in which I am interested."

"Not much mystery in it!" I cried.

"No, no," he answered testily. "The trappings may be a trifle bizarre, but don't let them blind you to the facts, all the essentials of which have been laid before us."

I sat down, determined to expose his trickery. "Pons, it is either a ghost or it is not a ghost."

"I can see no way of disputing that position."

"Then it is not a ghost."

"On what grounds do you say so?"

"Because there is no such thing as a ghost."

"Proof?"

"Proof to the contrary?"

"The premise is yours, not mine. But let us accept it for the nonce. Pray go on."

"Therefore it is a sentient being."

"Ah, that is certainly being cagey," he said, smiling provocatively. "Have you decided what his motive might be?"

"To frighten Mrs. Ashcroft from the house."

"Why? We've been told it's not worth much and will decline in value with every year to come."

"Very well, then. To get his hands on something valuable concealed in the house. Mrs. Ashcroft took it furnished—as it was, you'll remember."

"I remember it very well. I am also aware that the house stood empty for some weeks and anyone who wanted to lay hands on something in it would have far more opportunity to do so then than he would after tenancy was resumed."

I threw up my hands. "I give it up."

"Come, come, Parker. You are looking too deep. Think on it soberly for a while and the facts will rearrange themselves so as to make for but one correct solution."

So saying, he turned to the telephone and rang up Inspector Jamison at his home to request him to make a discreet application for exhumation of the remains of Captain Jason Brensham and the examination of those remains by Bernard Spilsbury.

"Would you mind telling me what all that has to do with our client?" I asked, when he had finished.

"I submit it is too fine a coincidence to dismiss that a heavily insured old man should conveniently die after he has made a will leaving everything to the nephew he has asked to come and live with him," said Pons. "There we have a concrete motive, with nothing ephemeral about it."

"But what's to be gained by an exhumation now? If what you suspect is true, the murderer is already dead."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Ah, Parker, I am not so much a seeker after punishment as a seeker after truth. I want the facts. I mean to have them. I shall be spending considerable time tomorrow at the British Museum in search of them."

"Well, you'll find ghosts of another kind there," I said dryly.

"Old maps and newspapers abound with them," he answered agreeably, but said no word in that annoyingly typical fashion of his about what he sought.

I would not ask, only to be told again, "Facts!"

When I walked into our quarters early in the evening of the following Monday, I found Pons standing at the windows, his face aglow with eager anticipation.

"I was afraid you might not get here in time to help lay Mrs. Ashcroft's ghost," he said, without turning.

"But you weren't watching for me," I said, "or you wouldn't still be standing there."

"Ah, I am delighted to note such growth in your deductive faculty," he replied. "I'm waiting for Jamison and Constable Mecker. We may need their help tonight if we are to trap this elusive apparition. Mrs. Ashcroft has sent word that the thread across the library was broken last night. . . . Ah, here they come now."

He turned. "You've had supper, Parker?"

"I dined at the Diogenes Club."

"Come then. The game's afoot."

He led the way down the stairs and out into Praed Street, where a police car had just drawn up to the kerb. The door of the car sprang open at our approach, and Constable Mecker got out. He was a fresh-faced young man whose work Pons had come to regard as very promising, and he greeted us with anticipatory pleasure, stepping aside so that we could enter the car. Inspector Seymour Jamison—a bluff, square-faced man wearing a clipped moustache—occupied the far corner of the seat.

Inspector Jamison spared no words in formal greeting. "How the devil did you get on to Captain Brensham's poisoning?" he asked gruffly.

"Spilsbury found poison, then?"

"Arsenic. A massive dose. Brensham couldn't have lived much over twelve hours after taking it. How did you know?"

"I had only a very strong assumption," said Pons.

The car was rolling forward now through streets hazed with a light mist and beginning to glow with the yellow lights of the shops, blunting the harsh realities of daylight and lending to London a kind of enchantment I loved. Mecker was at the wheel, which he handled with great skill in the crowded streets.

Inspector Jamison was persistent. "I hope you haven't got us out on a wild goose chase," he went on. "I have some doubts about following your lead in such matters, Pons."

"When I've misled you, they'll be justified. Not until then. Now, another matter—if related. You'll recall a disappearance in Dulwich two years ago? Elderly man named Ian Narth?"

Jamison sat for a few moments in silence. Then he said, "Man of seventy. Retired seaman. Indigent. No family. Last seen on a train near Crystal Palace. Vanished without trace. Presumed drowned in the Thames and carried out to sea."

"I believe I can find him for you, Jamison."

Jamison snorted. "Now, then, Pons—give it to me short. What's all this about?"

Pons summed up the story of our client's haunted library, while Jamison sat in thoughtful silence.

"Laying ghosts is hardly in my line," he said when Pons had finished.

"Can you find your way to the Lordship Lane entrance of the abandoned old Nunhead-Crystal Palace high level railway line?" asked Pons.

"Of course."



"If not, I have a map with me. Two, in fact. If you and Mecker will conceal yourself near that entrance, ready to arrest anyone coming out of it, we'll meet you there in from two to three hours' time."

"I hope you know what you're doing, Pons," growled Jamison.

"I share that hope, Jamison." He turned to Mecker and gave him Mrs. Ashcroft's address. "Parker and I will leave you there, Jamison. You'll have plenty of time to reach the tunnel entrance before we begin our exploration at the other end."

"It's murder then, Pons?"

"I should hardly think that anyone would willingly take so much arsenic unless he meant to commit suicide. No such intention was manifest in Captain Brensham's life—indeed, quite the contrary. He loved the life he led, and would not willingly have given it up."

"You're postulating that Ian North knew Captain Brensham and his nephew?"

"I am convinced inquiry will prove that to be the case."

Mecker let us out of the police car before Mrs. Ashcroft's house, which loomed with an almost forbiddingly sinister air in the gathering darkness. Light shone wanly from but one window; curtains were drawn over the rest of them at the front of the house, and the entire dwelling seemed to be waiting upon its foredoomed decay.

Mrs. Ashcroft herself answered our ring.

"Oh, Mr. Pons!" she cried at sight of us. "You *did* get my message."

"Indeed, I did, Mrs. Ashcroft. Dr. Parker and I have now come to make an attempt at least to lay your ghost."

Mrs. Ashcroft paled a little and stepped back to permit us entrance.

"You'll want to see the broken thread, Mr. Pons," she said after she had closed the door.

"If you please."

She swept past us and led us to the library, where she turned up all the lights. The black thread could be seen lying on the carpet, away from the east wall, broken through about midway.

"Nothing has been disturbed, Mrs. Ashcroft?"

"Nothing. No one has come into this room but I—at my strict order. Except—of course—whoever broke the thread." She shuddered. "It appears to have been broken by something coming out of the wall!"

"Does it not?" agreed Pons.

"No ghost could break that thread," I said.

"There are such phenomena as *poltergeists* which are said to make all kinds of mischief, including the breaking of dishes," said Pons dryly. "If we had that to deal with, the mere breaking of a thread would offer it no problem. You heard nothing, Mrs. Ashcroft?"

"Nothing."

"No rattling of chains, no hollow groans?"

"Nothing, Mr. Pons."

"And not even the sound of a book falling?"

"Such a sound an old house might make at any time, I suppose, Mr. Pons."

He cocked his head suddenly; a glint came into his eyes. "And not, I suppose, a sound like that? Do you hear it?"

"Oh, Mr. Pons," cried Mrs. Ashcroft in a low voice. "That is the sound Mrs. Jenkins heard."

It was the sound of someone singing—singing boisterously. It seemed to come as from a great distance, out of the very books on the walls.

"*Fifteen men on a dead man's chest*," murmured Pons. "I can barely make out the words. Captain Brensham's collection of sea lore is shelved along this wall, too! A coincidence."

"Mr. Pons! What is it?" asked our client.

"Pray do not disturb yourself, Mrs. Ashcroft. That is hardly a voice from the other side. It has too much body. But we are delaying unnecessarily. Allow me."

So saying, he crossed to the bookshelves, at the approximate place where she had reported seeing the apparition that haunted the library. He lifted a dozen books off a shelf and put them to one side. Then he knocked upon the wall behind. It gave back a muffled, hollow sound. He nodded in satisfaction, and then gave the entire section of shelving the closest scrutiny.

Presently he found what he sought—after having removed half the volumes from the shelving there—a small lever concealed behind a row of books. He depressed it. Instantly there was a soft thud—like the sound a book might make when it struck the carpet—and the section sagged forward, opening into the room like a door ajar. Mrs. Ashcroft gasped sharply.

"A sound like that, Mrs. Ashcroft," said Pons.

"What on earth is that, Mr. Pons?"

"Unless I am very much mistaken, it is a passage to the aban-

doned right-of-way of the Nunhead-Crystal Palace Line—and the temporary refuge of your library ghost.”

He pulled the shelving further into the room, exposing a gaping aperture which led into the high bank behind that wall of the house, and down into the earth beneath. Out of the aperture came a voice which was certainly that of an inebriated man, raucously singing. The voice echoed and reverberated as in a cavern below.

“Pray excuse us, Mrs. Ashcroft,” said Pons. “Come, Parker.”

Pons took a torch from his pocket and, crouching, crept into the tunnel. I followed him. The earth was shored up for a little way beyond the opening; then the walls were bare, and here and there I found them narrow for me, though Pons, being slender, managed to slip through with less difficulty. The aperture was not high enough for some distance to enable one to do more than crawl, and it was a descending passage almost from the opening in Mrs. Ashcroft's library.

Ahead of us, the singing had stopped suddenly.

“Hist!” warned Pons abruptly.

There was a sound of hurried scuttering movement up ahead.

“I fear he has heard us,” Pons whispered.

He moved forward again, and abruptly stood up. I squeezed out to join him. We stood on the permanent way of the abandoned Nunhead-Crystal Palace Line. The rails were still in place, and the railbed was clearly the source of the cinder Pons had produced for my edification. Far ahead of us on the line someone was running.

“No matter,” said Pons. “There is only one way for him to go. He could hardly risk going out to where the nearby Victoria line passes. He must go out by way of the Lordship Lane entrance.”

We pressed forward, and soon the light revealed a niche hollowed out of the wall. It contained bedding, a half-eaten loaf of bread, candles, a lantern, books. Outside the opening were dozens of empty wine bottles, and several that had contained brandy.

Pons bent to examine the bedding.

“Just as I thought,” he said, straightening up. “This has not been here very long—certainly not longer than two months.”

“The time since the younger Brensham's death,” I cried.

“You advance, Parker, you advance, indeed!”

“Then he and Narth were in it together!”

“Of necessity,” said Pons. “Come.”

He ran rapidly down the line, I after him.

Up ahead there was a sudden burst of shouting.

"Aha!" cried Pons. "They have him!"

In ten minutes of hard running, we burst out of the tunnel at the entrance where Inspector Jamison and Constable Mecker waited—the constable manacled to a wild-looking old man, whose fierce glare was indeed alarming. Greying hair stood out from his head, and his unkempt beard completed a frame of hair around a grimy face out of which blazed two eyes fiery with rage.

"He gave us quite a struggle, Pons," said Jamison, still breathing heavily.

"Capitall Capitall" cried Pons, rubbing his hands together delightedly. "Gentlemen, let me introduce you to as wily an old scoundrel as we've had the pleasure of meeting in a long time. Captain Jason Brensham, swindler of insurance companies and, I regret to say, murderer."

"Narth!" exclaimed Jamison.

"Ah, Jamison, you had your hands on him. But I fear you lost him when you gave him to Spilsbury."

"The problem was elementary enough," said Pons, as he filled his pipe with the abominable shag he habitually smoked and leaned up against the mantel in our quarters later that night. "Mrs. Ashcroft told us everything essential to its solution, and Harwell only confirmed it. The unsolved question was the identity of the victim, and the files of the national press gave me a presumptive answer to that in the disappearance of Ian Narth, a man of similar build and age to Captain Brensham.

"Of course, it was manifest at the outset that this motiveless spectre was chancing discovery for survival. It was not Jenkins but the Captain who was raiding the food and liquor stocks at his house. The cave, of course, was never intended as a permanent hiding-place, but only as a refuge to seek when strangers came to the house, or whenever his nephew had some of his friends in. He lived in the house; he had always been reclusive, and he changed his way of life but little. His nephew, you will recall Harwell's telling us, continued to subscribe to his magazines and buy the books he wanted, apparently for himself, but obviously for his uncle. The bedding and supplies were obviously moved into the tunnel after the younger Brensham's death.

"The manner and place of the ghost's appearance suggested the opening in the wall. The cinder in the carpet cried aloud of the abandoned Nunhead-Crystal Palace Line which the maps I studied

in the British Museum confirmed ran almost under the house. The Captain actually had more freedom than most dead men, for he could wander out along the line by night, if he wished.

"Harwell clearly set forth the motive. The Captain had sold off everything he had to enable him to continue his way of living. He needed money. His insurance policies promised to supply it. He and his nephew together hatched up the plot. North was picked as victim, probably out of a circle of acquaintances because, as newspaper descriptions made clear, he had a certain resemblance to the Captain and was, like him, a retired seaman with somewhat parallel tastes.

"They waited until the auspicious occasion when Dr. Weston, who knew the Captain too well to be taken in, was off on a prolonged holiday, lured North to the house, killed him with a lethal dose of arsenic, after which they cleaned up the place to eliminate all external trace of poison and its effects, and called in Dr. Weston's *locum* to witness the dying man's last minutes. The Captain was by this time in his cave, and the young doctor took Howard Brensham's word for the symptoms and signed the death certificate, after which the Brenshams had ample funds on which to live as the Captain liked."

"And how close they came to getting away with it!" I cried.

"Indeed! Howard Brensham's unforeseen death—ironically, of a genuine heart attack—was the little detail they had never dreamed of. On similar turns of fate empires have fallen!"

## *The Adventure of the Aluminium Crutch*

DURING THE EARLY years of our association, a rare few of the problems laid before my friend, Solar Pons, were brought through the offices of our good landlady, Mrs. Johnson. One of them was a curious affair that appeared to be little more than a case of illegal entry, but proved to be one that took on an added dimension which perhaps no one but Pons could have foreseen.

Among the ladies who came to visit Mrs. Johnson from time to time was a widow of some sixty years of age, Mrs. Fiona Porteous. On that October day, Mrs. Porteous arrived at No. 7B, Praed Street coincidentally with the arrival of Inspector Seymour Jamison, who came for no other purpose than to stop for an idle, purposeless visit, which was uncommon for him. Mrs. Porteous vanished into our landlady's quarters, and the Inspector mounted to ours and sat down. He customarily occupied an hour or two of Pons's time with vaunting successes or asking Pons's advice in matters under investigation; but on this day he had come rather to give vent to his disappointments.

He inquired whether Pons were at work at some criminous matter, and seemed to be aggrieved that Pons was not.

"I take it, however," said my companion, "that you are busy, as usual."

"You may say so," said Jamison in a voice laden with dissatisfaction. "We have several problems on which we're not making any significant progress. Oh, we caught Alfred Fletcher, the forger—though it took us seven months; and we managed to collar Rodney Stanyan, that effete young poet who had been plagiarizing his betters. Nothing much to either one—more or less simple matters of searching until we found them. And we'll convict the Russell Street murderer. But we haven't made any progress on the Midlands murder—or the thefts and substitutions at the galleries and museums—and we're as far as ever from a solution to the murder of Sidney Lowell, that crippled artist, in Bessborough Street, or the Aylesbury triple murder."

"You were looking for the son-in-law, I believe," said Pons.

"Yes, since he was estranged. But last night we found his body, too—miles away, and clearly murder too, not suicide. But once we uncover a motive, we might be able to solve Lowell's murder."

"Beaten to death with his crutch, was he not?" asked Pons. "I recall reading about the affair."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not." Jamison did not elaborate. "The crutch was all bent up and torn apart—that is, the ends were torn off and the middle part looked as if it had been used to beat Lowell to death, but it hardly seemed heavy enough for that, and Spilsbury's not inclined to agree that it alone was used, though some hairs adhered to it."

"Then it was not of wood," observed Pons.

"No, of aluminium—and rather light for a weapon."

He went on at some length, while Pons sat quietly listening. Inspector Jamison was manifestly making no appeal for suggestions from Pons, and Pons made none, only asking a question now and then in the interests of clarification. I noticed, however, that he had one ear cocked, as it were, on the premises beyond Jamison; every little while a sound came up from below—the opening and closing of a door, I made it; undoubtedly it was this that had divided Pons's attention.

The Inspector finished at last, and, having said all he meant to say, he made his departure, looking relieved, though Pons had offered little in the way of advice, scrupulously maintaining his own counsel unless asked—and Inspector Jamison had not asked. The door had hardly closed behind him when Pons turned to me, his eyes alight.

"I fancy Mrs. Johnson will look in on us within minutes. It was certainly her door that opened and shut several times."

"I heard it."

"Perhaps some trifling matter is troubling her visitor this afternoon," ventured Pons.

The outer door opened and closed. Almost immediately Mrs. Johnson's door opened, and her familiar steps sounded on the stairs, followed by other, heavier steps. Pons glanced at me and smiled.

Mrs. Johnson reached the landing. "Mr. Pons?" she asked beyond the door.

"Come in, Mrs. Johnson," invited Pons.

He strode across the room and opened the door. Behind our landlady loomed the imposing figure of her friend, Mrs. Fiona Porteous.

"It's not me, Mr. Pons, begging your pardon. It's Mrs. Porteous would like to talk to you, if you can spare the time."

Mrs. Porteous was already engaged in pushing our landlady into our quarters; her buxom figure was so formidable that she needed only to lean forward to impel Mrs. Johnson across the threshold. It was evident that a consultation with Pons had been suggested by Mrs. Porteous, and not by our landlady, whose diffident reluctance was only too patent.

Mrs. Johnson introduced us all around, forgetting that she had done so on a previous occasion, and ended with, "Mrs. Porteous has had a spot of trouble, Mr. Pons. She would be obliged to you if she could mention it."

"By all means," said Pons, with whimsical enthusiasm. "Pray sit down, ladies."

"Good of you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Porteous in a deferential tone of voice which was, however, immediately lost as she continued. "It's this way, Mr. Pons, somebody's been in my house. Twice! Mrs. Johnson says to me I'd ought to talk to you about it—" this she quickly revised at sight of Mrs. Johnson's quick expression of dismay to "—or I says to her maybe you'd look into it for me." She smiled ingratiatingly.

Pons's smile was somewhat less than enthusiastic. "What was taken, Mrs. Porteous?"

"Oh, nothing was took—that's it. And mine wasn't the only house in the street, either, that was entered."

Pons's interest quickened as readily as it had waned. His eyes lit up. "Ah, how then did you learn that your home had been entered?"

"Well, Mr. Pons, you may know how it is with people who live alone. You get used to everything in its place. You know just how the umbrella stands in the vestibule, and how you left the book lying face down you were reading, and which way every chair faces, and which door was open and which was shut." She glanced down apologetically. "A bit fussy, you may say, but that's how it is. Maybe it's for lack of anything else to do. The one time the door to my late husband's room was standing open; it was never open before. The next time—well, I mentioned the umbrella because it was the umbrella that was moved. I left it in its stand, with two canes that belonged to John.

"Two nights ago, when I came in from a card party, I found the umbrella lying on the chair nearby. So somebody's been there,



taken it out, and forgot to put it back. I know where it was when I went out, and I know where I found it when I got back; there's no use trying to tell me I did it myself and just forgot about it." Her implication clearly was that Pons had better not try to do so. "Besides, the one back window I'd left open was pulled shut—as if somebody came in that way and shut it going out."

"So what did you do, Mrs. Porteous?" asked Pons.

"Well, sir, I says to myself, when I saw the umbrella, if there's somebody been here, he might still be here, so, Fiona, my girl, I says, I'll just have a look around. I took John's leaded cane and I went from one room to another, I turned on all the lights and I looked under and behind everything. Nobody. Nobody was there. But two of the chairs in my parlour had been moved, and a sofa was out of line. Oh, somebody'd been there, all right.

"Then I looked around to see if anything was took. Nothing was. Somebody'd been in the large drawers, but not the small ones. And next day when I asked Emma Jagers—she's on my right—had she seen anybody about?—I found out that her house had been entered, too—and the house across the street, that's Mr. Harvey Bertrand's—had been got into. Each the one time. And like my own house, nothing was took. I've got the feeling whoever it was will be back, Mr. Pons. What I want is for you to look into it. I can't pay much, but I can pay some."

Pons sat for a few moments in silence, his eyes closed, his fingers tented before him. It was impossible to divine from the passivity of his features what he might be thinking. Presently, however, he opened one eye and fixed it on our client.

"And where do you live, Mrs. Porteous?"

"At Number 127 Lupus Street. I own my house. John left it to me. It's early Victorian. We bought it just five years ago."

Something in her prosaic account had plainly quickened Pons's interest. "And the umbrella, Mrs. Porteous—had it been opened?"

"Opened. The umbrella?" Mrs. Porteous was manifestly disconcerted. She flashed an indignant glance at Mrs. Johnson. "Why, I never. . . ." she began, ruffled, then composed herself and said instead, "I never looked. It's bad luck to open an umbrella in the house, Mr. Pons."

"I see," said Pons, the hint of a smile on his thin lips. "But I am not adept in arcane beliefs, Mrs. Porteous. When you reach home, pray examine the umbrella attentively, take it outside if need be, and open it. I am on the telephone. Call me promptly and let me know what you find, if anything."

"Am I to look for something?" Mrs. Porteous asked, with another glance at Mrs. Johnson.

"You are positive nothing was taken from your premises. Are you equally as certain that nothing was left?"

"Left, Mr. Pons? And what would be left?"

"Only you could know that, Mrs. Porteous. You know your premises. I do not."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Porteous expressively. "If anything was left there, I'd know it. Nothing was left. Everything in that part of the house John lived in mostly is the same as the day he died; from the hour he came in last time from the Tate and hung up his crutch a year ago, nothing's been disturbed there except for the dusting. And so with my part of the house."

Pons's eyes were now positively dancing with delight, whether at our client's delivery or for some other reason I was unable to ascertain.

"Your late husband was disabled, Mrs. Porteous?" he asked.

"He was that, Mr. Pons. Bad lame in his left leg. He came home that way from the war. Walked with a crutch the last years of his life. We lived on his pension. And I had a little inheritance of my own from an uncle. John used to like to go to the galleries and study the paintings. He once dabbled a bit in painting himself. Oils and watercolours."

"I will look into the matter, Mrs. Porteous."

"There now," said our client, with a glance of triumph in the direction of Mrs. Johnson. "I knew Mr. Pons was a gentleman!" She turned again to Pons. "And what am I to do, Mr. Pons?"

"Examine the umbrella," he answered.

She blinked. "And then?"

"Nothing more. We will call on you in good time."

So saying, Pons came to his feet. Clearly dismissed, Mrs. Porteous rose also. She extended a well-muscled arm and shook Pons's hand firmly. Our landlady favoured Pons with an apologetic glance, which Pons answered with a reassuring smile.

"You are surely not going to spend your time looking into a case of ordinary illegal entry!" I protested, when the ladies were descending the stairs.

"'Ordinary'? I think not. I submit there were some points of interest that escaped you, Parker."

"I saw none. And that matter of the umbrella! You don't mean to say you meant it?"

"On the contrary, I did. It is relative, however; it will give Mrs. Porteous something to do."

"What on earth difference does it make if it was opened or not?"

"Umbrellas have been known to conceal small articles," said Pons enigmatically.

"You don't really believe that something was left in that umbrella," I said indignantly. "If so, wouldn't it follow that something was left in each of the other houses entered?"

Pons smiled. "That is presumptive, certainly, but I would be inclined to doubt it."

"What is it then?"

"You have all the facts, Parker. A few trifling deductions should present you with a tenable solution."

"You are surely striding far ahead," I said.

"Say rather that I am making a daring assessment of coincidence. You know my feeling about coincidence. We have heard one so glaring that I cannot understand your failure to see it at once."

"Enlighten me."

"My dear fellow, within an hour we have had propounded to us two mysteries. . . ."

"Two?" I cried.

"Yes, two. One by Inspector Jamison, the other by our client. Pray permit me to continue—two mysteries, then, in each of which there figures a man who gets about with the aid of a crutch, and who is a frequenter of art galleries. This suggests nothing to you? I submit it should."

"A case of mistaken identity?" I ventured.

"Oh, fie! By Mrs. Porteous's account, her husband has been dead for a year. One could hardly mistake someone for him."

"You raise some tantalizing points," I admitted. "There are similarities, indeed—but you will yourself admit that life frequently presents us with the most astonishing coincidences. These two late gentlemen—Mr. Porteous and the murdered Sidney Lowell—may have frequented the galleries and museums—after all, the Tate is not far from Mrs. Porteous's address—but there is no evidence that they ever met, or even knew each other."

"Nor is there any evidence to the contrary. I fancy there is more to the former. I submit that, even if they never met they were aware, one of the other. How could it be otherwise? In the account of Lowell's life in the press, it is set forth that he was a copyist who spent many hours at the galleries copying some of the masterpieces

there—a man of some modest skill, apparently, for he seems to have had a ready market for his wares, according to the accounts. It is highly probable that at some time during his visit to the galleries Porteous encountered Lowell at his work. Both carried a crutch. Does it not seem likely that they may have spoken to each other? A common affliction is a credible ground for striking up at least a speaking acquaintance."

I conceded this, withal grudgingly.

"Very well, then. Carry on from there. You know my methods."

With this caustic advice, so usual for him, Pons turned to occupy himself with the writing of some short work. He drew up several drafts before he was interrupted by the telephone.

I could hear our client's voice coming in over the wire. "Mr. Pons? Mrs. Porteous here. I don't know how you ever knew it, but that umbrella had been opened. It wasn't folded back together as carefully as I fold it. What do I do now?"

"We expect to call on you at noon tomorrow," said Pons. "One word of caution, however—under no circumstances open your door to anyone until we arrive. Tomorrow morning's papers will carry a notice over your name; I will have inserted it. Pray take no telephone calls in regard to it."

"What is it? What are you about, Mr. Pons?" Mrs. Porteous's indignation and curiosity boomed into the room.

"You will have to trust me, Mrs. Porteous," said Pons, and thereupon hung up before our client could protest further.

"Notice?" I asked.

Pons did not reply until he had finished a final draft of his announcement. "I fancy that will do," he said, and handed it to me.

I read it with growing astonishment.

"Will the gentleman who last month left on my premises an aluminium crutch please be so kind as to claim it? Apply to Mrs. John Porteous, 127 Lupus Street, at any time after midday."

I looked up. "This is utterly fantastic. I don't recall hearing Mrs. Porteous say anything of the kind."

"Nor did she."

"Pons, this is the sheerest intuition!"

"I respect intuition in the fair sex. I am wary of it in our own. No, Parker, it is ratiocination at its most unassailable."

"You cannot mean it!"

"Indeed I do. I fear, though, that you are taking my little notice a trifle too literally. Read it with more imagination, my dear

fellow." And with that he left me to my own thoughts while he buried himself in his files of recent criminal events.

When I came in from a round of calls late in the day, I found Pons still absorbed in study. He had put aside his cuttings and was now poring over a dossier. When I had removed my light overcoat, I stepped around and gazed over his shoulder; he was reading the Yard dossier on Sidney Lowell.

"Ah, Jamison has after all sought your help," I said.

"A reasonable deduction," answered Pons, "but faulty in this instance. I asked him to have this information sent around. He was good enough to do so."

"Expecting your assistance in return."

"Possibly. There were one or two points about Lowell's death that interested me."

"For example?"

"I submit that there is something a trifle odd about a presumably impecunious artist's being beaten to death. The motive certainly cannot have been robbery—though it is true that his painter's case was not found at the scene; yet there is no definite evidence to show that he carried it at the time, though he had it with him when he left the Tate within the hour. The manner of his death suggests that he was killed in a rage—perhaps by more than one person. I have studied these notes carefully. They deal not only with the evidence at the scene of the crime, but also in some detail with the life and habits of the late artist."

"What has all this to do with the invasion of our client's home?" I could not help asking.

"Gently, gently, Parker! All in good time. We are not due at Mrs. Porteous's home until tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, this little problem of Jamison's challenges me. I am interested in Sidney Lowell, who turns out, by the way, to have been not so impecunious as I had imagined; indeed, he had considerable assets in the way of investments in very sound stocks, and his artistic skill seems to have been greater than merely passably good. He is on record as having sold an excellent copy of a Canaletto to Cardinal Fonseca at a quite respectable fee, and only six months ago sold a copy of Vermeer's *View of Delft* to Lord Farrington. An excellent work; I took time this afternoon to go around and look at it."

"The original was recently stolen, if I recall," I said.

Pons nodded and went on. "He sold some highly praised copies to collectors on the Continent, and particularly to the Americans, who are always so casual with their wealth. He was apparently a most painstaking copyist, and an artist at least high in the second rank on his own abilities."

"Odd that he should not have perfected his own talent rather than copy the masters."

"Ah, well, copying the masters is a way toward perfection. Perhaps Lowell recognized that he lacked certain qualities of greatness and did not labour under the illusion of genius, that curse of the creative artist that too often precludes a healthy objectivity about his work. Lowell was the only son of a poor collier in Westmorland. A teacher undertook to send him to study art and so launched him on his career, which an unfortunate accident interrupted—hence his disability. He had been haunting the art galleries for over a decade, and was well known to the curators and many of the regular visitors, all of whom regarded him with esteem both as man and artist. He seems to have entered but one art competition fifteen years ago, and his work aroused some curiosity by failing to take first place, some critics charging that the judges were inclined toward the second-rate performance of a first-rate artist over the first-rate performance of an unknown. This is rather more often the case than one supposes, and virtually all prizes and awards in the creative arts are suspect. Consider the Nobel Award in Literature, for instance—bestowed upon such minor figures as Carducci, Gjellerup, and Pontoppidan, while such literary giants as Proust, Hardy, and Conrad have been ignored."

"Surely his work was subsequently recognized."

"He never again strove for an award, claiming—with some justification—that such competitions were dishonest. He pursued a relatively reclusive life in bachelor quarters in Park Lane."

"What was he doing in Lupus Street?"

"That does not appear to have been shown in these reports," said Pons dryly.

"Are you planning to look into the murder?"

"It interests me," said Pons thoughtfully. "But it is Jamison's responsibility, not mine, and the Yard seldom looks appreciatively on my little efforts unless someone with authority there initiates them. Since no one has done so, I fancy that they may well be on the trail. They may on occasion be guilty of extraordinary stupidity,

but in the main they are conscientious and not without skill, however plodding they may seem to be. I have, by the way, asked Jamison to go around to our client's home with us tomorrow."

"He won't thank you," I said, chuckling.

"I would be astonished if he did," replied Pons.

Pons had given Inspector Jamison a summary of our client's case over the telephone, for on his arrival at 7B just before noon next day the Inspector huffed and trumpeted about the invitation.

"I don't usually look into matters like this, Pons. Illegal entry. Petty theft—and that's not even been established in this case. Pickpocketing. And that like. Nor do you. I don't understand you, Pons." He looked at my companion as if challenging him to reveal his motive in asking Jamison to accompany us. "This matter should have been reported to the local constable."

Pons remained noncommittal, save to observe that little crimes were often the precursors of capital offenses.

"I would regard this as minimal indeed. Nothing has been reported as taken," said Jamison. "The whole matter has the sound of some sort of hoax."

"Does it not!" agreed Pons imperturbably.

"And so does this," added Jamison, throwing to the table a copy of that morning's *Mail*, with the advertisement Pons had had inserted in our client's name circled in red crayon.

"It is bait," said Pons. "I hope to net a fish with it—one to your taste, Inspector."

Jamison flashed him a sharp glance but held his tongue.

We set out presently for our client's home, not in Jamison's police car, but by cab, at Pons's insistence. Nor were we deposited at the door of Number 127 Lupus Street; we were taken around the corner and left in the middle of Bessborough Street.

"Mrs. Porteous's house may be under surveillance," explained Pons. "We'll make our way to the rear of the house."

Jamison stood briefly and looked around. "Just over there," he pointed, "is the spot Lowell's body was found. He was killed some time before midnight and found by a cab-driver soon after."

"A curious place for him to be," observed Pons. "Has it been determined why he was here? It is not on the way to his quarters."

"We've conjectured that he had an assignation with someone," said Jamison. "Incidentally, his painting case and paraphernalia have been found on the bank of the Thames. Perhaps, after all, robbery was the motive."

Our client was astounded when we presented ourselves at the back door of her home. She made no effort to conceal it.

"I saw that notice, Mr. Pons," she said at once, as she admitted us, plainly disgruntled. "I can't imagine what you meant by it." Patently the opinion she had held of Pons's abilities had suffered a decline.

"Time will tell, Mrs. Porteous," said Pons. He gestured toward Jamison. "This gentleman is from Scotland Yard."

Mrs. Porteous was further taken aback. She knitted her brows and looked Jamison up and down, clearly not forming any advantageous judgment, and finally fixed unwavering eyes on his bowler until the Inspector, somewhat abashed, removed it.

"A highly irregular thing to do," murmured our client. "Do I understand that you gentlemen intend to wait until someone calls here and asks for that imaginary crutch?"

"Ah, Mrs. Porteous," said Pons, "I assure you the crutch is not imaginary. It hangs, I believe, in your late husband's quarters very likely in his wardrobe. Do us the favour of fetching it."

Our client's jaw fell, but only momentarily. She bridled. "It is my late husband's crutch, Mr. Pons," she said, and made no move.

"So you told us, Mrs. Porteous," said Pons. "Let us have it brought out so that your visitor, when he comes, may see that there is, after all, an aluminium crutch on the premises."

"Well, I never. . . ." began our client truculently.

"Madame, we wish to see the crutch in question," said Jamison heavily.

Our client finally gave way. She turned, muttering, "You may as well use the parlour; it is adjacent to the front entrance." And, having led us there, she vanished in the direction of the stairs opening out of the lower hall. The sound of her climbing the stairs was determinedly audible.

"A tartar!" murmured Jamison.

"Small wonder her husband spent so much of his time at the galleries," I said.

"Women living alone can do with a bit of aggressiveness," observed Pons quietly.

Mrs. Porteous returned presently, carrying her late husband's aluminium crutch. "Here it is, gentlemen, though I don't know, I'm sure, what you want it for."

Pons took the crutch and shook it gently. He smiled. Then he placed it against the wall of the room opposite the entrance.

"Now, Mrs. Porteous, we will just wait upon events," said Pons.



"Events!" she cried. "Who in the world is interested in John's crutch besides me?"

"My methods may be a trifle unorthodox," began Pons.

Our client broke in. "That is hardly the word, sir, hardly the word. I hope you're not intending to surrender my husband's crutch to any jackanapes who may call for it!"

"If our notice has been seen by the person or persons who will be interested in it, you may be sure, Mrs. Porteous, that someone will call—perhaps the very person who invaded your house and other houses in the street. You will show him into this room, where we will make certain that he sees the crutch before he catches sight of us. That is all you need do."

Mrs. Porteous, I fear, thought Pons mad and made no secret of it. Pons's tone, however, clearly dismissed her. Quite obviously irritated, she retired from the room.

"Pray examine that crutch carefully, Jamison," said Pons then.

The Inspector crossed the room and picked up the crutch. He subjected it to a careful scrutiny, but his face betrayed no discovery. "It's a plain aluminium crutch, well worn down at the bottom."

"Newly capped, is it not?"

"I see that. Still, though, worn. The cap was put on—let us say—not more than six months before Porteous died."

"Six months more or less," agreed Pons. "The precise time is immaterial. Is there nothing more that strikes your professional eye?"

Jamison shook his head even as his eye fell upon what Pons had intended him to see. "Why, there are spots of what seems to be oil or watercolour. Small, yet distinct. Did Porteous paint as well as visit the galleries?" Before Pons could reply, Jamison's eyes widened. "Pons!" he cried, "this is Sidney Lowell's crutch!"

"Ah, Jamison, you make progress, however slowly."

At this moment the sound of the doorbell came to our ears.

"Hist!" cautioned Pons. "Let us move over to the wall away from the door."

We took our stand along the near wall, opposite the crutch Jamison had hastily put down against the far wall in line with the door. Mrs. Porteous, meanwhile, had come from the rear of the house and now walked past toward the front door. She opened it.

A man's voice sounded. "Do I address Mrs. Fiona Porteous?"

"You do, sir."

"My card, madam. I saw your advertisement in this morning's papers."

"Mr. Adam Forsyth," read Mrs. Porteous in a voice that was intended for our ears.

"I have come for my poor friend's crutch. He was set upon by hooligans in the street nearby and carried off - his crutch was evidently thrown onto your premises. Do you still have it?"

He betrayed a certain anxiety not unmixed with eagerness.

"I do. Please come this way."

Mrs. Porteous appeared in the doorway and, catching sight of us pressed against the wall to the right of the entrance, stood off to that side to block her visitor's view. He was a well-dressed man of perhaps forty; he wore a neatly clipped moustache and carried gloves. His appearance exuded confidence. He saw the crutch at once and strode directly over to it without a glance to either side.

He seized the crutch and turned to look into Jamison's revolver.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Forsyth, we'll have Lowell's crutch," said Pons.

"A trap!" exclaimed Forsyth in disgust.

He surrendered the crutch to Pons. Without delay, Pons carefully unscrewed the top. He turned it upside down. From the hollow stem slid a cardboard tube. Pons caught it, dropped the crutch, and uncapped the tube, tipping this up too. Out slid a tightly rolled canvas. Jamison's captive watched with a scornfully amused expression.

Pons unrolled the canvas and held it up. "A Cézanne, I believe. Its theft may not yet have been discovered, because the copy Lowell left in its place was designed to deceive the experts for whom Lowell had nothing but contempt."

On our way to our quarters in the police car—once Adam Forsyth had been given into the custody of the men from the Yard for whom Jamison had sent—the Inspector grumbled, "That was a long shot, Pons—as long a one as I've ever known you to make."

Pons demurred. "I think not. The coincidences in the problem were too many to be accounted for by any other explanation. It was rational conjecture. Spilsbury's conclusion that the crutch was probably not the murder weapon struck me as crucial. If not—and the crutch seemed to me fundamentally too light a weapon for such use—why was it torn apart?—if not because someone expected something to be concealed in it. What was most likely for an art copyist to conceal in a hollow crutch but a rolled-up canvas? And if that were indeed the object of his murderer's search, what more

likely than a stolen canvas of some value, particularly since London has been plagued for some time by thefts and substitutions of excellent copies for the genuine canvases?

"I fancy you will find that Lowell was engaged for a long time in more than just copying art masterpieces; he was also forging them, and with singular skill. He was certainly not operating alone, and his murder may very likely have been a matter of thieves falling out. What turned Lowell to this kind of criminal activity suited to his talents? Very probably vanity. I submit it was his rejection by the 'experts'—those so often self-appointed arbiters of taste and quality whom the history of art, literature, and music have so frequently proved wrong. Lowell played a kind of game that pleased his vanity—but his collaborators were not playing a game. I suggest, Jamison, that you take along one of those experts—Duveen, perhaps—Sidney Lowell so heartily despised, and examine all those 'copies' bought recently by collectors here and abroad. I daresay you will find that many are genuine, and that the works hung on the walls of many a gallery in their place are copies, to be stolen only when suspicion of their authenticity arises.

"What brought about a rupture between Lowell and his collaborators, the differences that ended in Lowell's murder and whether Forsyth himself had a hand in it, or whether it was done by others at his behest—I leave to the Yard to discover. What seems certain is that sometime either before or after Lowell left the Tate on the day of his murder—I would venture to guess that it was after—he discovered that he was being followed, and concluded that his former collaborators were after the Cézanne they must have known he had in his possession. He conceived the plan to conceal the stolen canvas, and sought out the late John Porteous's home to exchange crutches. He most certainly knew Porteous; the circumstantial evidence permits of no other conclusion. He was fortunate enough to find no one at home, and he very probably remained hidden in the house for some time—the hiatus between the Tate's closing and the time of his murder suggests the likelihood—but his pursuers undoubtedly had the street under observation and waited on his reappearance. Lowell very probably did not anticipate being killed, certain that he was ultimately too valuable to his cronies. Put Forsyth through it, though he may remain silent and not betray any other members of the organization, which, I fancy, ranges to the Continent.

"It seemed to me certain that the presence of a disabled art lover in the vicinity of the premises of another just prior to the former's murder was part of a design and not just an outrageous coincidence. Lowell undoubtedly hoped to recover the stolen Cézanne at some later time. Since he did not live to do so, his murderers, knowing that the painting must have been concealed after he had temporarily eluded them, narrowed their search to one of the houses in Lupus Street. They did not know precisely where to look—a canvas lends itself to many places of concealment—until my conjectural notice in this morning's papers informed them that an exchange of crutches had taken place. They were undoubtedly aware of the fact that Lowell had on occasion used his crutch in which to carry canvases.

"Though, as Dr. Parker is wont to say, coincidences abound in life, I make it a rule to suspect the too fortuitous. I commend that course to you, Inspector."

## *The Adventure of the Circular Room*

IT WAS A WILD, windy night in April of a year in the early twenties when the diabolic affair of the circular room was brought to the attention of Solar Pons. I had been engaged in compiling my notes from which these narratives of my friend's experiences are fashioned in an effort to elucidate his extraordinary methods, and this task had taken all the leisure moments of that day, for my medical practise had not yet grown to such a degree that I had no free time during the afternoon. Pons was at work on his since-published commentary, designed as a companion piece for Dr. Hans Cross's remarkable *Criminal Investigation*. He had just put his notes aside, and had reached for his violin upon the mantel, when he heard the sound of hoofbeats on the road beyond our lodgings in Praed Street.

"Who could be seeking our assistance on such a night as this?" I asked, hoping I had correctly interpreted the slowing-up of the hoofbeats.

Pons had already stepped to the window and drawn aside the curtain, to look down to where the street-lamp shone before the building.

"A young woman of great determination, to dare such weather. Wind and rain, Parker—oh, to be in England now that April's here! But she is coming up the steps, and her brougham waits."

Our bell pealed insistently.

Pons stood with his head cocked a little to one side, listening. He had permitted the curtain to fall back over the window, and stood with his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown. "Ah, Mrs. Johnson has not yet gone to bed. She has not long since put on her bedroom slippers and her robe. There she is at the door."

In a moment Mrs. Johnson's heavy footsteps came creaking up the stairs, followed by lighter steps, which, however, came with no less assurance. Mrs. Johnson knocked on our door, tried it, and opened it apologetically.

"A young lady to see you, Mr. Pons."

"Show her in, by all means, Mrs. Johnson."

Mrs. Johnson stepped back, and there walked into our quarters a clear-eyed young woman whose dark hair was moulded severely about her head under a small toque of an inexpensive fur. She paused just past the threshold, her mackintosh thrown back over her shoulders.

"Do sit down, Miss . . . ?"

"Manahan."

"Miss Manahan. I trust nothing has happened to your patient?"

"So do I." She gasped. Then she smiled, and her rather severe face broke out into most attractive features. "I have heard of your methods, Mr. Pons. That is why I came to you."

"It is evident that you are a trained nurse, for your cuffs show under your jacket, and there is a small iodine stain on your finger, though there is no wound there. You have come to consult me about your patient?"

Miss Manahan sat down, having given me her raincoat to hang up. She clasped her hands, bit her lip, and looked faintly uneasy.

"I do hope I am not doing the wrong thing, Mr. Pons, but I have such a strong feeling about this that I could not put it off any longer."

"I assure you, I have every respect for a woman's intuition."

"Thank you. You make me feel more right about coming here, though I am sure I do not know what Mr. and Mrs. Davies would think if they knew."

"They need not know. But pray let us hear your story, Miss Manahan."

Thus urged, our attractive visitor composed herself, sat thinking for a moment as if to choose a point of departure, and then began. "Mr. Pons, I have been out of work for some time, and quite by accident I chanced upon an advertisement in the *Telegraph* a fortnight ago. I have it here." She took it from a little bag she carried in her pocket, and handed it to Pons, who spread it on the table so that I, too, could read it.

"Wanted: A capable young woman with professional nursing knowledge to serve as companion for elderly lady. Applicant should be prepared against distressing circumstances. Good remuneration. Please apply to Mr. Wellman Davies, in care of this paper."

Pons handed it back without a word.

"I made application, and three days later I received a letter asking me to call at a house in Richmond, just out of London along the upper reaches of the Thames. I found the house to be of recent construction, very pleasant and rather modern, set on the bank of the Thames in harmonious surroundings, and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Wellman Davies, who had in their care Mr. Davies's elderly aunt, a Mrs. Lydia Thornton, who had only recently been released from an institution for mental health, and was still in an uncertain state to the extent of needing a companion with some knowledge of professional nursing.

"Mrs. Thornton proved to be a genteel lady approaching sixty years of age. She had been confined, she confided, for seven years, during which time her nephew had very kindly managed her affairs, and finally, when her condition had improved, she had been released, so that she might come to live in the house the Davies had built for her with funds which the executor of her late husband's estate allowed them at her request. My patient was very unsure of herself, still; following her husband's death, she had gone through a mental breakdown not uncommon to people of middle age; she was difficult at night, but by day, generally, she was so normal that it was hard to believe in her mental state."

"It is often so," I put in.

"Yes, and I soon discovered that she was the victim of alarming hallucinations. She was convinced, for instance, that her late husband called to her to come to him. She heard his voice in the night, and told me about it quite matter-of-factly, as if it were nothing at all strange. That, I believe, is common enough in such cases."

"Is it, Parker?" Pons looked at me.

"Yes, indeed. The woman has plainly come to accept it as part of her existence."

"Pray go on, Miss Manahan. I fancy you have something more to tell us."

"The hallucination which seems to me the strangest of the lot is one which so profoundly disturbs my patient that I fear for her mind, and I am sure she will eventually need to return to confinement. I discovered it on the second morning after I came, though I was not wholly unprepared for it; both Mr. and Mrs. Davies had very considerably and delicately told me that Mrs. Thornton might 'break out' at any time, and I must not be too distressed or alarmed, for her 'seizures' did not last long. Nevertheless, I was alarmed at Mrs. Thornton's initial 'seizure.'

"I occupy the adjoining room to Mrs. Thornton's, which is a lovely, circular room at one corner of the house, constructed to afford a view of the grounds, the summer-house, and the Thames there. On the morning in question, I had not yet risen, when I heard my patient scream; then my door was flung open, and she came into my room wide-eyed with fear, and trembling, labouring under the amazing hallucination that her room had been changed, that she was being preyed upon by outside forces—for she had gone to sleep with her bed facing the windows, as usual, and had awakened to find herself and her bed facing my room.

"I persuaded her to return to her room with me, and we found it just as I had last seen it when I left her on the previous night. I thought this a most amazing hallucination, and I found it recurrent—sometimes nightly for a while, and then not occurring for two or three days at a time. I could understand her auditory hallucination about her dead husband's calling to her, since I could believe in the psychological basis for this; but the more I considered this hallucination of hers about her room, the more puzzled I became.

"At the same time, I began to be aware of something strange in the house. I cannot describe it, Mr. Pons, but it was an impression that grew upon me. I cannot understand it, either, for I have been very well treated, not only by my patient, but also by Mr. and Mrs. Davies and their single servant, a woman who comes by the day from the vicinity. As my patient's hallucination persisted, my own impression about the strangeness of the house grew, and several times I found myself being regarded with something akin to alarm by Mr. Davies, who looked away when I saw him looking at me. This has been going on for approximately a fortnight; I am unable to put my finger on anything wrong, Mr. Pons, yet I know there *is* something wrong there."

She was still, expecting Pons's questions. Pons sat touching the lobe of one ear with his long, bony fingers for a few moments in silence; then he asked whether our client had correlated any facts in the matter. "Did the occurrence of your patient's outbreaks or 'seizures,' as you call them, coincide with any household event apart from them?"

"I think not. It is only that on the day before her first seizure, she was visited by her sister-in-law, who said something which upset her very badly. In the early dawn of the next day she had her first outbreak."



"Ah! Has her sister-in-law visited her since then?"

"Three times, Mr. Pons."

"And afterward?"

"She had those attacks."

"According to your narrative, however, she also had such outbreaks on mornings which did not follow visits by her sister-in-law."

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Davies offered any explanation of these seizures?"

"No, Mr. Pons. They were very much distressed by them, and hoped that I would not mind too much, for they had looked forward to bringing Mrs. Thornton back to a normal existence, and wanted, at all costs, to avoid the necessity of sending their aunt back to the asylum."

"Do you know what form her insanity took?"

"I believe it was manic depression which came as a result of her husband's sudden and rather shocking death; this took place during her delayed climacteric. The situation is not uncommon."

Pons flashed a glance at me.

"Yes, that is right. Those years are very difficult, and any untoward shock may bring about disastrous mental breakdowns."

Pons touched his fingertips together in a characteristic gesture, and closed his eyes. "With what does Mrs. Thornton occupy herself during the day?"

"She reads, or I read to her. She plays solitaire; sometimes I play with her. Once or twice she has evinced a desire to play chess, but she always tires and is unable to finish a game."

"How does she strike you as a chess-player?"

Miss Manahan was somewhat startled by the abruptness of Pons's question. "She is not a good player."

"I fancy that is in part due to her mental instability, wouldn't you say so, Parker?"

I agreed.

Pons's eyes flashed open and fixed upon Miss Manahan in a long, keen stare. "Have you yourself sought any explanation of why your patient should labour under the extraordinary delusion that her room and bed, as well as her own person, are at the mercy of malefic forces?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I have been unable to do so. My knowledge of mental cases is limited."





"What would you say of this, Parker?" asked Pons.

"It is highly unusual. In most such cases there is usually a well-hidden source for all hallucinations and illusions, and once it is discovered and exposed to the patient, the cure is often forthcoming. Mrs. Thornton's illusion is most extraordinary."

"Surely, Miss Manahan, you have your patient's case history from the institution where she was confined?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

"You have studied it?"

"Of course."

"Very well. What then of her previous record?"

"In what respect?"

"Manifestly in regard to the particular hallucination to which you refer."

"There was no previous record of its occurrence."

"Hal" exclaimed Pons, sitting upright in his chair and regarding Miss Manahan with that peculiarly benevolent expression which he always bestowed upon his clients when his interest was aroused. "Surely even insanity has a pattern, Miss Manahan?"

"There are many kinds, Mr. Pons."

"Yes, yes—but you yourself have grave doubts, is it not so?"

"Yes, it is. But, Mr. Pons, Mrs. Thornton is very convincing in her agitation. She struggles so hard *not* to believe in her hallucination, and each time we return to the room to find it as it was before, she breaks down in tears; that sorrow is genuine, Mr. Pons, and it is most terribly distressing. I am appalled by it; I was impelled to come here by it; I cannot understand what is happening; I admit I have had little experience with mental cases—but, Mr. Pons, if ever I saw a woman who is fighting very bravely and very hard to escape her mental prison, that woman is my patient. I admire her very much, I admire her courage, and it is heartbreaking to endure her horror and terror and her final grief, as each time she is brought to face the room unchanged in every respect."

"You have come here on your own account, then?"

"Entirely. I want so to help her, if I can, and if somehow her sister-in-law is responsible for the pattern of events, I want to know what to do to prevent my patient's being so dreadfully upset."

"What do you suggest?"

"Mr. Pons, it is Thursday, my day off. Tomorrow night Mr. and Mrs. Davies are leaving to visit some relatives in Edinburgh. If it is

possible, could you come out to the house at 23 Linley Road and yourself speak to Mrs. Thornton?"

"At what time are your employers leaving?"

"They are planning to take the seven o'clock from Euston."

"Very well. We shall be at the house at approximately that hour, or as soon thereafter as possible."

Miss Manahan rose. "Thank you, Mr. Pons."

I brought her raincoat, helped her into it, and showed her to the door.

Pons was sitting in an attitude of deep contemplation when I returned.

"What did you think of the young lady, Parker?"

"Most capable and conscientious."

"With spirit, imagination, and level-headedness, moreover. Miss Manahan clearly suspects a nasty business, and I have no doubt she is correct. Is that not a most curious hallucination of Mrs. Thornton's?"

"I have never had any clinical experience with anything even remotely similar."

Pons chuckled. "Allowing for the fact that your clinical experience is somewhat limited, I fancy that states the case well enough. What explanation could you, as a medical man, have to offer?"

"I have not seen the patient, Pons."

"Come, come—do not stand on ceremony. I am not asking you to prescribe."

"Well, then, I should say that some sudden dislocation in time or space could account for it."

"If, for instance, the sister-in-law had imparted to the patient a piece of very shocking information?"

"Possibly."

Pons closed his eyes. "And what did you make of her dead husband's voice calling to her?"

"Very common in such cases. The relation between the shock of his death and her initial collapse is very clear."

"Dear me! How insistent we all are upon simplifying even the most remote aspects of human experience! It has been well said that perhaps it is we who are insane, and the so-called insane who are sane. What a proposition!—eh, Parker? And yet, how dreadfully logical! The case of Mrs. Thornton fascinates me out of all propor-

tion to its importance, for its evidence of the depths of depravity and despair of which the human mind is capable."

" 'Depravity' is not the word."

"I beg your pardon, Parker. Let us just settle on 'decay,' then. I fear poor Mrs. Thornton is close to the brink, and our client is rightfully loath to see the poor lady go over it again. Would that more young ladies in the nursing profession were possessed of such consciences!"

The house in Richmond was indeed an attractive one, viewed as we saw it in the early twilight of the following evening. It was a building of one storey, low and rambling, with a quaint round corner crowned by a colourful turret; clearly it had been built by someone of imagination with a good sense of harmony, for even its colour scheme in white and blue was pleasing to the eye. It was set, moreover, on a gentle slope toward the Thames, in spacious grounds which had been landscaped, and the summer- or tea-house Miss Manahan had described was placed in the midst of a scant grove halfway between the house and the river.

Mrs. Thornton was plainly the most genteel of ladies. She was dressed in a white dress, with a few frills, and wore a velvet band about her neck to support a cameo. Her eyes were bird-like, and her appearance elfin. Pons and I were introduced to her as friends of Miss Manahan's, and the old lady seemed quite pleased to meet someone new.

For a little while Pons talked generalities in his most garrulous vein. Both Miss Manahan and Mrs. Thornton easily fell into his mood, and it was with something of a grave change in manner that Pons introduced the subject of the late Mr. Thornton.

"I understand you have lost your husband, Mrs. Thornton?"

She seemed somewhat startled, but responded readily enough. "Yes, that was eight years ago—no, nine it is now, I think. It was sudden."

"Quite a shock to you?"

"Yes, a severe shock." She smiled. "It took me some time to get over it. I am afraid we poor women are not as strong mentally as we are physically."

It was Miss Manahan who next undertook to change the subject, by making mention of her patient's sister-in-law.

"I am afraid Miss Lavinia is not very kind," said Mrs. Thornton

hesitantly. "If she could only know Wellman and Pauline as I know them."

"They are very kind to you, Mrs. Thornton?"

"If it had not been for them, I would still be—I would still be in the asylum." She said this bravely, though with obvious effort. "When it seemed that I was improving in my condition, Wellman was notified, and he would not rest until he had secured my release. He had my authority to build this little house for me, and we are all living here very cosily together. I do not know where I should be without Wellman; he has always managed my affairs, and it is distressing that my sister-in-law should say the things she does." She looked toward the window suddenly and, with an expression of dismay, cried out, "Oh, it is becoming foggy!"

"We'll draw the curtains, never mind, Mrs. Thornton," said Miss Manahan reassuringly. Then she turned to Pons and asked casually whether he would like to see the house before Mrs. Thornton retired.

"If Mrs. Thornton would not mind."

"By no means, Mr. Pons. I am quite proud of it. I worked on every detail of it with Wellman when it was under construction, and it is almost like my own creation! Do go, too, Dr. Parker; I can keep quite well by myself for so short a time!"

Thus urged, I followed Pons, whose interest, of course, was Mrs. Thornton's bedroom, the spacious chamber in the rounded corner of the house. This was, as Miss Manahan had said, a singularly attractive room, with a small bed set almost in the centre, and facing toward the windows which opened upon the lawns sloping toward the river. A dressing-table stood over against the wall to the left, and to the right, immediately next to the door leading into Miss Manahan's room, stood a little case filled with books. A comfortable rocking-chair of recent manufacture, a little table, and several other chairs were distributed about the room, into which opened three doors—one to a bathroom jointly shared by Mrs. Thornton and Mr. and Mrs. Davies, on the left, one to Miss Manahan's room, and one into the hall that ran along the building there, separating the bedrooms from the drawing-room, dining-room, and kitchen on the side of the house facing the road.

Pons stood for a few moments in silence, gazing about the room. "This is the way the room has always been?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"And when Mrs. Thornton has her seizures?"

"She describes it in various ways. She says she has awakened to find herself facing the door to the hall, with the bookcase over against the windows; or again, facing the Davies' room, with the dressing-table against the windows."

"You have never observed anything which might give her cause or reason for such hallucinations?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Have the Davies offered any explanation?"

"Yes. They felt that perhaps the fact that the room was unusual in that it was circular was at the bottom of her hallucination, and they offered to exchange rooms with her; but she would not hear of it."

"Ah! Why not?"

"Because she felt she must fight this out by herself."

Pons looked at me with a strange gleam in his eyes. "Surely that is remarkable insanity, is it not, Parker?"

"Most remarkable."

He smiled and began to move around the room; he looked casually at the dressing-table, the bookcase; he examined the windows and opened the door to the bathroom, muttering to himself as he went along. "Hm! Bath in pale green. Very neat. . . . They have certainly given her the best view of the river," adding over his shoulder to Miss Manahan, "You will have to draw the curtains all the way, for the fog is growing thicker every minute. I can hardly make out the summer-house." Then he got down on his knees and examined the bed and the floor, crawling around in a manner which puzzled and amused our client, for he was careless, as always, of his clothing, and he picked up all manner of lint, hairs, and the like, for only a few small rugs were laid on the floor, and the rest of it was bare, though not highly polished. He was occupied at this for some time before he rose to his feet, dusted himself, and confessed himself finished.

"There are then two bedrooms besides this, and two bathrooms?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"A drawing-room, a kitchen, a dining-room — and what else?"

"A little room for storage, and two closets, with a pantry. That is all."

"No basement?"

"Only a small cellar for fruit directly under the kitchen."

"Ah, well, I shall just look around."



So he did, much to my amazement, even descending into the small, square concrete cellar under the kitchen. When he came up again he looked extremely thoughtful and somewhat perplexed.

"We can return to Mrs. Thornton now," he said.

Upon our return, darkness having fallen, Mrs. Thornton bade us good-night and retired to her room, accompanied by Miss Manahan. Pons lit his pipe and sat with his long legs stretched out before him, looking quizzically over at me with his keen eyes.

"Did not Mrs. Thornton strike you as a most unusual mental case?"

"Indeed she did."

"I watched you with some interest, Parker. The expressions of your features are informative. I submit you did not believe Mrs. Thornton at all deranged."

"Well, it is true her entire manner is that of one who has recovered from a mental lapse."

"Is it not, indeed! I fancy very few patients would have the courage to speak so openly and frankly of their troubles."

"Oh, some of them do nothing else."

"Ah, yes, the hypochondriacs. But you did not think Mrs. Thornton one."

"No."

"You felt that her conduct was inconsistent with her seizures? Come, is it not so?"

"Well, yes, I admit I did. But of course, the trouble with such mental cases is that the patient always seems perfectly normal, and it is difficult to tell which is the real psyche, to put it in those terms—the woman we saw or the woman she is overnight. I thought her comments about the sister-in-law most indicative."

"That it was Miss Lavinia Thornton who was at the bottom of her trouble?"

"I think there can be no doubt of it. I believe we should pay the lady a call and hear what she has to say."

"Oh, I fancy we can avoid doing so," said Pons with assurance. "I know what the lady has to say."

"Surely you have not seen her already?"

"I have had no occasion to do so. Mrs. Thornton told us."

He left me to puzzle this out for myself, and went back into reflective silence, puffing at his pipe from time to time, and crossing and re-crossing his legs. He got up presently and suggested that,

in view of Miss Manahan's present occupation, we might just walk about the grounds a bit.

We left the house and found that the fog had indeed grown thick. It was evident, however, that Pons wished to see the summer-house before we returned to our lodgings, for it was directly there that he walked, with an uncanny instinct for its direction from the house. It was, like the house, of wood, but with a little stone terrace around it, and a stone floor; it was not locked—indeed, it seemed to have no lock—and Pons made his way inside. Like most structures of its kind, it was obviously designed chiefly for use at garden parties, or for reposing on a summer's day, made up, as it was, of a single large room, with quaint, rustic benches and a table to match. Pons used his lantern to examine the walls and floor.

"Are those not large stone blocks, Parker?" he inquired thoughtfully.

"Yes. Though I have seen larger."

"It is a substantial floor."

I agreed that it was.

"Hm! It does not seem to you that there is anything noteworthy about it?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that it is a very workman-like job. If ever I decide to leave Praed Street, I shall have to look up Mr. Davies's builder."

"Well, there is surely no time like the present. Perhaps Miss Manahan can find it out for us."

We returned to the house, where we found our client awaiting us amid some wonderment as to where we had gone. Pons explained that we had walked in the grounds, and then asked whether Mrs. Thornton had gone to sleep.

"Not yet, Mr. Pons."

"Ah! Would you be so good as to ask her two questions for me? Whether, if she knows the name of the builder of this house, she might be kind enough to let my friend Parker here have it? And whether her late husband's executor can easily be reached by telephone?"

Miss Manahan looked at him somewhat strangely, but immediately departed to do as he requested. She came back in a few moments with both questions answered; the builder lived in London, not very far, as it turned out, from Praed Street; and, as for the executor, he was no longer active, since her husband's estate

had naturally now been turned over to her, and her nephew was taking care of it for her.

"Now there is just one more thing," said Pons. He produced from his pocket a piece of ordinary chalk. "After your patient has gone to sleep, let us just try an experiment. Take this chalk and draw a small line down any portion of the wall, across the narrow moulding between wall and floor, and out onto the floor, constructing a line of approximately a foot in length, as inconspicuously as possible."

She took the chalk with an absurd expression of bafflement on her attractive features. "I am afraid your methods are quite beyond me, Mr. Pons."

"Oh, there is nothing at all mysterious about my methods, Miss Manahan, believe me. They are all too simple. We have been proceeding all along on the theory that Mrs. Thornton's tale is a fabrication born of hallucination out of her mental condition. Let us just now proceed from the opposite pole. Mrs. Thornton's tale is either true or not true; that is simple logic. We shall have to discover the answer to the riddle ourselves, for plainly she cannot help us."

I could not help adding a question of my own. "Would it not be appropriate to learn whether or not Mrs. Thornton's sister-in-law has visited her recently?"

Miss Manahan responded at once. "It is strange that you should ask, Doctor. Miss Lavinia called this morning."

"Ah, and I fancy the result of her call was the same as before?" put in Pons.

"Yes, Mrs. Thornton was left much distressed."

"Well, I daresay we can do no more here. How long, by the way, are Mr. and Mrs. Davies planning to be gone?"

"They expect to return on Sunday night."

"Capital! That will give us every opportunity of solving this little mystery. I trust your night will not be too difficult a one, Miss Manahan, but if any trouble should arise, pray do not hesitate to call on us, no matter what the hour. In any case, I hope you will send us a wire in the morning and inform us how Mrs. Thornton spent the night."

"I will do so, Mr. Pons."

We bade our client good-night and made our way back to the Tube. Pons was singularly silent, with a foreboding frown on his

forehead, and he walked hunched up, his chin sunk into the folds of his coat.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"A devilish business, Parker. It goes against my grain."

"Ah, you have a theory, then?"

"On the contrary, I have the solution."

"Impossible!" I cried. "I have been with you every moment."

"Ah, yes, physically. Nothing is ever 'impossible' with quite your vehemence, my dear fellow."

More than that he would not say.

In the morning Miss Manahan, instead of sending a telegram, came to see us in person.

She had a sorry tale to tell, for Mrs. Thornton had suffered a most difficult night. It had begun, as on other occasions, with the conviction that she heard her husband's voice calling to her, but last night there was an additional note in that the poor distraught lady had fancied her husband had begged her to leave this earthly plane and join him, and this had kept her awake for more than an hour at approximately midnight. In the early hours, everything had gone as usual: Mrs. Thornton had come into Miss Manahan's room crying that "they" had changed things again, "they" were after her, as always. When they had returned, the room had been just as it should be.

I listened attentively to Miss Manahan's recital, and when she had finished I could not prevent myself from identifying the poor woman's type of delusion. "Paranoid delusions," I said, shaking my head. "I'm afraid it is all up with her. She will get progressively worse."

"And the chalk mark, Miss Manahan?"

"I believe it was just as I made it."

Pons chuckled delightedly. "Aha! I detect a note of hesitation in your voice, Miss Manahan. Come, come—what is it?"

"Well," she laughed nervously. "I'm afraid I am beginning to have hallucinations, too, Mr. Pons. I did think the mark was a little off kilter, but I guess I must have drawn it crookedly; I did it in a hurry, and did not want to wake my patient; but when I first saw it this morning, I did get somewhat of a surprise."

"Ah, no doubt. I fancy we shall be over in your direction tonight, Miss Manahan. Can you find us a room for the night?"

"Why—I think so."

"Expect us then. We shall arrive directly after dinner." He turned to me when she had left. "It is as I thought, Parker. We shall have to lose no time putting an end to this diabolic game."

Fog rose again, as on the previous night, when we set out for Richmond, and Pons made no secret of his elation, saying that he preferred not to be seen in the vicinity of 23 Linley Road, and generally acting in a most mysterious manner, which he said nothing whatever to explain. Nor did he volunteer any explanation to Miss Manahan; he asked at once to see her patient, the gentle Mrs. Thornton, and when the old lady came, he sat down next to her, took one of her frail hands in his, and spoke most cajolingly.

"Do you know, Mrs. Thornton, I have become most interested in your trouble. Unlike Miss Manahan, I am beginning to believe that your room actually is changed, just as you described it to Miss Manahan to be."

I thought that this blunt approach might be harmful to the patient, and was hard-pressed to interfere; but I knew better, and Mrs. Thornton's reaction was one of bewildered interest, as if at first she had not understood that Miss Manahan had spoken to us of her hallucinations, and secondly, as if she were pleasantly surprised to discover someone who did not dismiss her hallucinations for what they were.

"Will you give Dr. Parker and me an opportunity to look into the matter?"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Pons." She looked hesitantly at Miss Manahan, and was reassured by the young woman's confident smile.

"Then for tonight only I want you to share Miss Manahan's room, and permit Dr. Parker and myself to occupy your own. I assure you we shall look into the matter with fairness and impartiality."

For only a moment the old lady hesitated. Then she began to tremble, biting her lip, her emotions aroused. "I am afraid—I—it's no use. It is nothing anyone else sees, or hears—nothing. Oh, Mr. Pons, if only you could!"

"Let us just see," replied Pons calmly. "Surely there is no harm in trying."

In the end, Mrs. Thornton gave in. Thereupon, Pons and I retired at once to the patient's room, though not before adjuring

both the ladies to carry on for the remainder of the evening as if they were quite alone in the house.

Once in the room, Pons drew the curtains and turned on the light. He took a magnifying glass from his pocket, found the chalk mark Miss Manahan had made, and came to his knees to examine it.

"Ah, our Miss Manahan is not perfect in observation. Look here, Parker."

I took the glass and held it over the angle of the chalk line.

"I submit that Miss Manahan could not have drawn that line in such a fashion. There is a clear, if fractional break, between the wall and the floor. Or let us say, rather, between the edge of the moulding and the floor."

"Yes, that is all very true," I conceded, "but what is the explanation?"

"Ah, it is the obvious one, surely." He pocketed his glass, took out his penknife, opened it, and slipped its blade beneath the moulding; he moved it freely about. "Does not that suggest anything to you?"

"The moulding appears to be attached to the wall rather than the floor."

"Ah, well, that is very often done." He moved along the wall five feet and again passed his knife-blade between the moulding and the floor. "I fancy that is the rule." He got up. "Hm! Now let us see. We shall not go to bed, of course, but let us rig up some sort of dummy to occupy Mrs. Thornton's place. I fancy we shall want to be out of sight of that bathroom door, for, unless I am greatly mistaken, it plays its own small part in this mystery."

I looked at the door. "I am in the woods, Pons. How can you possibly make such an assertion?" I strode over, opened the door, and looked into the bathroom.

Pons observed me with manifest patience. "Let us say that you make yourself comfortable on the floor behind the door as it opens. I myself will find a place behind the bed." As he spoke, he began to arrange Mrs. Thornton's bed with a roll of blanket and a pillow to simulate someone sleeping there. Having finished this, he turned out the light, crossed to the windows, and threw up the blinds, together with the central window, which was the largest; this, despite the fog, he opened halfway. In the adjoining room, meanwhile, the ladies were preparing for bed.

"Now, then, Parker—not a sound. Whatever you hear, say

nothing; whatever happens, do nothing until I give you the word."

"If you would give me a hint, Pons. . . ."

"We shall see devil's work tonight, Parker, unless I am much mistaken."

He said no more; so I composed myself to snatch as much sleep as possible.

Some two hours passed in absolute silence, when there came to my ears the faint sound of a whispered voice. It seemed to rise from somewhere in my immediate vicinity, and, as I listened, it increased in volume.

"Lydia! Lydia!" it cried. "Come to me. Come over. All is pain where you are. Only here will it end in joy again. Lydia! Lydia!"

A man's voice—or was it a man's voice? It had a hollow, funereal sound, and I felt my skin prickle, as if something of the fog flowing into the room through the open window had penetrated my flesh. It was horrible, it was grotesque, it was damnable.

Then I heard Pons stir, and in a moment he raised his own voice in a remarkable quavering cry that might have been Mrs. Thornton herself replying, "Frank? Frank? Where are you, Frank?"

"Come over to me, Lydia. Come. It does not matter how you do it, only come. We can be happy again over here." Then the voice faded as it had come, diminishing altogether in a last whispered, "Lydia!" urgent and compelling.

Pons waited a few moments before coming quietly to my side and whispering into my ear. "I fancy that is somewhat more than an auditory illusion, is it not, Parker?"

"Good God! I begin to understand!" I answered. "It is damnable. But why—why?"

"Wait yet a little. It is far from over."

In two hours time, everything happened as before, I had dozed off and was awakened by the voice calling once again. This time Pons did not come to my side, though a low clucking sound he made after the voice had ceased assured me he had heard.

Then all was silence again, and so it remained until dawn.

It was then that I became conscious of a tremor in the floor of the room where I sat. I was about to call out to Pons when his cluck of warning stopped me. And then the entire floor began to move, slowly, almost imperceptibly. I had hardly time to assimilate this before Pons's urgent whisper reached me. "Keep behind the bathroom door." I crept backward along that weirdly moving floor,

revolving slowly, soundlessly, until the dressing-table was indeed before the windows lining the east wall of that room, and the bookcase over before one door. There was now light enough in the room to see it as Mrs. Thornton must have seen it, and it took no imagination to understand how horrified and terrified the poor, stricken lady must have been at this sight, and how much more to come back into the room and find it as it should be.

As soon as the movement stopped, Pons twitched the folded blanket and pillow from the bed, gave vent to a low sobbing moan, and, hastening across the floor to the door leading into Miss Manahan's room, he opened it and slammed it shut. This accomplished, he raced silently around the room to where I crouched, one hand warningly grasping my shoulder.

On the instant, the door to the bathroom was cautiously opened, someone looked into the room, and then immediately the door was drawn noiselessly shut once more.

"So!" whispered Pons. "That is dastardly work indeed, Parker. And one alone could not do it, no!" He peered around one edge of the window nearest us. "Hal there is the signal. Come along."

He darted to the open window, crawled out, dropped to the ground, and ran off into the now rising fog. I followed close upon his heels. Without hesitation, he ran to the summer-house and entered it.

The rustic table had been moved aside, and in the centre of the floor gaped an opening through which light flowed upward. Pons walked cat-like to the edge of the opening and looked down. I peered over his shoulder.

There below was an extraordinary sight. A man was bent at some kind of great instrument, whose shafts passed into a tunnel leading in the direction of the house we had just left, and before him, attached in some fashion to the machine at which he worked with such quiet persistence, was a perfect miniature, walls and floor, of the room we had just quitted, and, as he worked, the miniature floor slowly shifted its position, righting itself.

"Good morning, Mr. Wellman Davies," said Pons in a scornful voice. "I fancy you will have no further occasion to carry on your devil's work."

At the sound of Pons's voice, Davies whipped around. His hand reached out for a spanner which lay nearby, but Pons's hand was quicker; he showed his revolver, and Davies, a short, benevolent-



looking man with pale grey eyes and a clipped moustache, whose nose showed signs of eyeglasses having been worn, hesitated, and glared at us in baffled rage.

"Come up, come up, Mr. Davies. We have yet to take your wife. How did you find your friends in Scotland?"

"In reality," said Pons in the brougham on our way back to Praed Street through the first morning sun to penetrate the night's dense yellow fog, "the problem offered of no other solution. Indeed, Mrs. Thornton, poor unsuspecting soul, told us all herself. What had Miss Lavinia, her sister-in-law, to say that would upset her? What could it be other than criticism of, and warnings about Mr. and Mrs. Davies? It had to be, for Mrs. Thornton said, you remember, 'If she could only know Wellman and Pauline as I know them.' Alas! poor woman!

"The fundamental problem was, of course, that of the circular room. Either it was changed, as Mrs. Thornton said, or it was not. Miss Manahan and Mrs. Thornton herself were convinced that it could be nothing but a hallucination. On the contrary, I proceeded from the assumption that something *was* wrong with that room, and I sought for evidence that it was so. Obviously, the walls were fixed, but the floor did not seem to be. When the space between the moulding along the wall at the floor and the floor itself was manifest, it was clear that in some fashion the floor was constructed on a large turntable. I thought there might be a clue in the basement; but there was no basement beyond that concrete-walled cellar. Hence I sought the summer-house, and it was immediately apparent to my eye that the large stone blocks concealed a trap-door. The assumption was obvious that that diabolic business was carried on from there. An accomplice was clearly indicated, and who else but Mrs. Davies? It was she who made sure that Mrs. Thornton had fled her room, and signaled her husband in the summer-house so that he could return the room to its normal appearance, which he was enabled to do by means of that small-scale model geared to the original.

"It was Davies, of course, who imitated her dead husband's voice from the bathroom. Obviously, they did not go to Scotland, but crept back to the house to carry on their fell game, and the reason for that subterfuge seemed inherent in Miss Manahan's story; she told us, you will remember, that Mr. Davies had begun to look at her with apprehension, as if he feared she might leave them; it was

just the opposite; he realized that Miss Manahan was not obtuse, and might begin to suspect their involvement in the matter; so he and his wife absented themselves, for this purpose of establishing to Miss Manahan's knowledge that things occurred in their absence, never dreaming that Miss Manahan had already consulted us.

"And the motive for this horrible plot to drive that poor lady into hopeless insanity was surely obvious, too; Davies had had control of his aunt's money, and he did not want to relinquish that control. She was wealthy; he was not. He had already squandered some of her money on this house, and if he could succeed in so breaking down the poor lady's mental health that she could be confined once more, or in driving her to suicide by that bogus haunting of her with her husband's voice, his squandering might never be uncovered, and he would remain permanently in control of her late husband's estate, for it had been placed in her hands, and she had given it over to Davies to manage. A callous, diabolic business long premeditated. I shall see to it that Mr. and Mrs. Wellman Davies get their just deserts."

## *The Adventure of the Purloined Periapt*

WE HAD BEEN talking about the science of deduction that noon hour, when we turned into Praed Street not far from our lodgings, and Pons touched my arm with a gesture designed to direct my attention to a young man walking not far ahead of us.

"Now then, Parker, let us see what you make of that fellow going there. You know my methods; apply them."

"He seems a perfectly ordinary young fellow," I answered at once. "Like thousands of others."

"Yes, indeed. But do not speak so hastily. Look again."

I saw that the object of our scrutiny walked along with occasional glances at the numbers, and said that manifestly he was looking up an address.

"Elementary. Anything more?"

"He seems to be of modest means; he is not yet thirty years of age; he is obviously English."

"You see nothing further?"

"Nothing but the obvious details relative to the colour and make of his clothes." I glanced at him. "I suppose you are about to tell me a host of incredible conclusions to which you have come in these few steps."

"No, no, you overrate my poor powers, Parker. I was about to add only that he is unmarried; he lives in the suburbs of London; he cycles to work; he is very probably a bookkeeper; and he is employed in our immediate vicinity. Moreover, he is not imaginative, but rather prosaic; he is precise and methodical, but sparing at the expense of neatness, and he is at the moment doing without his luncheon in an effort to accomplish something which has nothing to do with his work, for he is too conscientious to take time away from his work to pursue an inquiry into what is a purely personal matter."

For a moment I was too astonished to reply. Then I protested. "Oh, come, Pons—I have every respect for your use of the science of deduction, but I cannot follow you in all that."

"I assure you it is all extremely simple, my dear fellow. Surely no wife would permit her husband to go to work in such unpressed

clothes, any more than she would allow him to wear a shirt which carries on the cuff the kind of ink marks commonly found on the cuffs of those engaged in bookkeeping? By the same token, the fellow is sparing at the expense of neatness, for he has not had his suit pressed, nor his shirt washed; yet he dresses rather well, if in singular dreariness of colour, betraying a lack of imagination."

"He cycles, you said."

"Surely that mark on his trousers' leg is nothing other than the mark of one of those clips designed to keep the trousers free of the wheel."

"I missed that. But how, then, do you know he lives in the suburbs?"

"Because a cycle is the readiest way to work from the suburbs, if one is employed in the heart of the city and is at the same time of such modest means that a certain care in spending money is advisable."

"Very well, granting that—I fail utterly to understand how you can say with such positive assurance that he is employed in our vicinity."

"Ah, but surely that follows inevitably. If he cycles to work, obviously he has his cycle at hand. Since he does not use it to look up an address which I fancy will turn out to be our own, certainly it is not too much to deduce that his place of employment is so close to the address he seeks that it would be superfluous to use his cycle!"

I shook my head. "I am afraid I am destined always to fall short of your kind of observation, Pons."

"But you have your diagnoses to uphold, Parker, and they should be your primary concern." He smiled. "Ah, see; it is as I thought. He has reached Number Seven; he pauses; he is going in. Now we shall soon learn what it is that troubles him to the extent that he is willing to depart from what is doubtless a long-established routine in order to bring the problem to us."

As we entered the outer door to our lodgings, we were seen by Mrs. Johnson, who had answered the bell.

"You're in luck, Mr. Harris. Here they are now." She smiled in our direction and raised her voice a little to say, "Here's a gentleman to see Mr. Pons!" and then vanished discreetly into her own quarters.

"Come along, Mr. Harris," invited Pons, as we ascended the stairs to our own lodgings on the first floor.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Harris soberly, and set out after us

with an expression of intense gravity on his serious young features.

In this prosaic fashion began one of Solar Pons's favourite adventures, for Mr. Sidney Harris had come to consult Pons about the loss of a jeweled amulet, to which he referred constantly as "my uncle's periapt." He was a young man whose demeanour gave evidence of every deduction Pons had made of him; he readily admitted that he was employed as a bookkeeper for the firm of Chasins and Abramson only three streets away from our lodgings, and he told his story with simple precision.

"I live with my sister, who keeps house for me, and there are living with me my father, who is in ill health, my brother, who is occasionally employed as a clerk in a tobacconist's shop, and my cousin, Richard Murchison. We live in South Norwood, and I cycle to work every day, since my salary does not permit of unnecessary expense in traveling to and from the place of my employment. About three months ago my uncle died; he was Teale Murchison."

"Ah, the publisher of religious books."

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The firm still carries his name, though he was no longer actively associated with it at the time of his death. He was my mother's only brother, and he lived in the country south of London."

"A wealthy, charitable old man," observed Pons. "How does it come that his son lives with you?"

"He has a small annuity, and contributes modestly to the household expenses. We do not own the house; I take it by the month. The fact is, Mr. Pons, Mr. Murchison thought his son a wild boy because he had an unfortunate affair with a young lady, and he cut him off with but a modest allowance."

Pons's interest kindled. "To whom, then, did Mr. Murchison leave his wealth?"

"To charity, Mr. Pons."

"His house?"

"I am his heir, in accordance with the terms of his will. Unfortunately, the house has been put up for sale; it is a large, rambling structure, and there is simply not enough left from my uncle's estate to enable me to keep the house up. We had no knowledge of my uncle's doings. Mr. Murchison was a very religious man, but he was also a very crotchety one, with a ready temper and a sharp tongue, which he regretted many times thereafter. I felt very badly about his action in regard to his son, for Richard is not wild in the sense his father had it, and he did not deserve the treatment he

received. Mr. Murchison had always had a fondness for me; he believed that I was a 'steady' young man." He said this with an apologetic grimace, which made him instantly more likable.

"I had hoped to be married on some part of my uncle's wealth, but now I shall have to put that off until after the house is sold, for, of course, I intend that my cousin Richard shall share whatever can be realized on the sale of the house. I had intended, as soon as I learned of the terms of the will, that Richard should share with me. However, when we went to my uncle's bank after the will was read, we discovered that he had only two months previous to his death converted all his cash reserve, all his stocks and bonds, into gold pieces, and had then gone about London bestowing his wealth upon various charities. We traced some of it, but naturally made no attempt to trace it all, since my uncle had constantly spoken of giving everything he owned to charity, and it was, finally, no surprise to learn that he had done so. However, he thought very well of me, as his only sister's first child, and he left his house and furnishings to me. Among the possessions he bestowed upon me was a valuable little periapt of beaten gold, set with four emeralds and a single ruby. I have no idea as to its worth, but it was set apart in the will as mine, with my uncle's instructions that I follow his precept and carry it more or less as he did, in the nature of a good-luck piece. I accepted my uncle's periapt, and have carried it ever since."

"How large was this amulet?"

"About two inches in diameter. I believe it was handmade, except for the settings."

"A plain gold piece set with jewels?"

"Not quite, Mr. Pons. My uncle had had some religious verses inscribed into the back of it."

"Let us come now to the incident of its loss."

"That took place this morning. I did not have to reach my desk this morning until eleven o'clock, since I had worked overtime last night. As a result, I departed from my usual custom of taking a steam-bath near my place of work, and took a bath at home. As far as I know, I was alone in the house, except for my sister, who rapped on the bathroom door while I was in the tub, to say that she was going shopping. Since I meant to change clothes, I had emptied the pockets of my suit, and had ranged their contents on my bureau. Among them was my uncle's periapt. About ten minutes after my sister had gone out, I came out of the bathroom and went into my own room. Almost instantly I discovered that my

uncle's periapt was missing. I thought I had mislaid it, or that it had fallen from the bureau; but it did not reappear. In my agitation, I forgot to put on the fresh clothes I had laid out, and came away again in my old suit, as you see me. I thought the matter over in the hour before my luncheon, and determined to put the problem before you."

"The door was not locked?"

"Neither back nor front door, Mr. Pons. My sister had not gone far away; I was in the house; I suppose she did not consider it necessary to lock the doors."

"So that anyone could have walked into the house and taken the periapt?"

"I am afraid so."

"Did very many people know of your having this trinket apart from the members of your household?"

"Not more than half a dozen or so in the neighbourhood, and perhaps one or two people in the office."

"Yet a child, who had no previous knowledge of it, could have walked into your room and made off with it."

"I am afraid that is the case, Mr. Pons. Perhaps the problem affords nothing in the way of evidence, but I hesitated to go to the police and have the pawnshops watched, because I do not really know that my uncle's periapt has as much actual value as it has intrinsic value to me. It is rather a matter of sentiment than of actual monetary worth. I would like to have it recovered, and, while I cannot afford much additional expense, I am sure we could come to some agreement about your fee."

Manifestly Pons had made up his mind to find the purloined periapt, for he smiled and suggested, "Perhaps we ought just to run out to your home and look around a little in the hope of discovering the lost amulet."

Harris looked gravely at his watch and shook his head. "I am sorry, but I cannot come along. I would be late to my work if I did so. However, I will send a message to my sister to expect you. I am sure I wish you luck, Mr. Pons, for your luck is mine. But I know my uncle's periapt was on my bureau when I went into the bathroom, and it was not there when I came out. That is the long and short of it."

Immediately after luncheon Solar Pons and I set out for South Norwood.

Mr. Harris's house appeared to be one of a great number built in the same plan, in a somewhat restricted neighbourhood, for living space was obviously crowded, and the street outside the house was occupied by a great many urchins of both sexes. We were admitted to the house by a tired and harassed-looking woman whose features plainly and unmistakably identified her as our client's sister. Tired as she was, however, she was in good voice.

"You're the gentlemen Siddie telephoned about. 'Agatha, I'm sending two gentlemen out to look around a bit,' he says to me. 'Whatever for?' I asked him, but he did not answer."

Nor did Pons volunteer any information, though she paused pointedly.

"He said I was to show you right to his room, gentlemen, and here it is, just as he left it. I ain't had time to put his clothes away, that he was to wear and forgot. Seems to me Siddie gets more forgetful every day."

I confess that at this point, with the vision of our client as a forgetful young fellow, I began to feel that the adventure of his uncle's stolen amulet was certain to turn out to be one of the most trivial of all those exploits upon which I had had the good fortune to accompany my friend, Solar Pons. And our almost instant discovery on entering Harris's chamber came as confirmation of this conviction, for there, in plain sight on Harris's bureau, lay the object of our search!

Pons closed the door behind him, shutting out our client's curious sister, and went directly over to the periapt.

"Ah, I fancy this is what we want."

"And more of a wild goose chase I have never seen," I said in disgust. "That fellow simply mislaid it, and his sister found it and put it back."

"Slowly, slowly, Parker! How delightful and how empty life would be if all things were so simple! But I fear it is not so. You will reflect that his sister has only just now told us she had no time to put Harris's clothes away; it is not too much presumption to believe that she had no time to clean this room, either; there is no evidence of it. Furthermore, the actual reappearance of this periapt is not adequate grounds for adducing that our client did not know what he was talking about. No, you may depend upon it, Parker, our client meant and believed and knew just what he said; as he put it, the long and the short of it is that the periapt was on the bureau when



he went to take his bath, and it was not there when he came back; now it is some three hours, almost four, since that time, and here it is back on the bureau once more. Yet it was gone, it had been taken. But manifestly it had not been stolen because of its monetary value."

"Unless no pawn-broker would accept it," I protested.

"In less than four hours, the thief had poor faith indeed if he gave up trying to dispose of it so quickly." He picked it up. "Besides, it has a good value. The jewels are real enough, and if I am any judge, the piece is solid gold. I fancy any pawn-broker would be happy to lend a modestly substantial sum on this piece. Let us just examine it."

He bent over, turned it about, smiled with a most quizzical expression in his eyes, and handed it to me. "What do you make of it, Parker?"

I took it and scrutinized it closely, aware that something about it had caught Pons's interest and imagination. The face of the amulet was not particularly attractive; indeed, I should have said it was singularly unattractive; its ruby was set squarely in the centre, and four little emeralds framed it in the shape of a cross. The entire face had a rough appearance, as if it had been pounded and worked by hand, and it badly needed burnishing. I turned it over and discovered that the back of the piece was burnished and carried the religious "verses" of which Harris had spoken. *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. Numbers: 8, 2.*

"It appears to be quite valuable," I said, handing it back.

"Nothing more?"

I smiled. "If there is anything more to be learned from that piece, I should be delighted to be instructed."

"Ah, forgive me, Parker; I am your humble servant. I should say only that it is possible to draw a conclusion or two from it. The late Murchison was a wise old bird, who, though he fancied his nephew, did feel that he lacked imagination and was altogether a little obtuse in matters pertaining to his own best interests. Plainly, too, he was a man who believed that one ought to merit his just deserts."

"My dear Pons! You are joking."

"Not at all. It is all written here as plainly as this quotation from the Bible."

"I fail to see it."

"Look again."

He returned the periapt to my hand, and I examined it once more. I could not ascertain what it was that gave Pons any reason to make the deductions he had just made. I said so, with some heat.

"Ah, well, ponder it. Perhaps it will come to you."

I shrugged, a little nettled. "Well, this must certainly go down as our most unimportant and most quickly solved puzzle."

"On the contrary, it has only begun. I daresay we shall have a little excursion before we are done. Come, we are finished here. Let us just go back into the city and surrender the periapt to Mr. Harris."

So saying, he opened the door of the chamber and stepped out just as our client's sister made a show of being busy not far away. It was clear that she had been listening at the threshold. We bade her good-afternoon and set out for Chasins and Abramson's, to deliver his amulet to Mr. Sidney Harris.

Our client was soberly pleased at Pons's discovery, though a little nervous at having been summoned from his work to take time for Pons's questions. He strove to settle upon a fee, but Pons would not ask one.

"By no means, Mr. Harris. I found your little puzzle instructive, and our discovery of the periapt was due to no acumen of mine."

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Harris for the third time. "I know it was not there, it was not in the room—I searched for it carefully."

"Ah, it is strange how objects can elude one. Tell me, Mr. Harris, do you have the key to your late uncle's house?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Would you like to look at it?"

"I have for some time been entertaining the thought of buying or renting a house in the country. It may be that your uncle's home is in the nature of what I had in mind. Do you think we might go down to look it over?"

"When I can get away."

"Ah, but I would rather not lose time. I should prefer to go down within a short time. If you will but lend me the key."

"I think that will be all right, Mr. Pons. You can bring the key back to me here tomorrow."

He detached the key from a ring in his pocket, and gave it to Pons.

"By the way, your late uncle was a Roman Catholic, was he not?"

"Yes, sir. Our family belongs to that faith."

"You mentioned your family this noon. Would it be too much to

ask you to describe them to me? Your sister, of course, we have seen."

Harris looked apprehensively toward the clock on the wall of the waiting-room, but nevertheless set forth upon the details Pons had asked of him, with such precision that in a remarkably short time he had brought his father, his brother, and his cousin to vivid life, so that it seemed to me I should be able to identify any one of them at sight.

"Ah, that is splendid, Mr. Harris. Is it my impression that your uncle carried this periapt as a kind of good-luck charm?"

"So he said."

"Of some years' standing?"

"That was our belief."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Harris. Good-day."

As we were walking leisurely back toward our lodgings, Pons beckoned one of the street gamins to us; I recognized him for the son of a locksmith who had his little shop in the vicinity. The boy came running up, a bright-eyed lad of ten or thereabouts, touched his cap, and stood with his arms akimbo before Pons.

"Alfred, my lad—do you think you might find three other boys and come round to 7B posthaste?"

"I think so, Mr. Pons."

"Capital! I have a little mystery to solve. Be off with you now."

The boy cut away and vanished into an alleyway; in a moment his voice sounded at a distance, raising a hue and cry for a companion. Pons looked after him with a whimsical smile.

"Are you taking to the children to assist you now, Pons?" I asked.

"I have used these lads before your time, Parker. And no doubt I shall use them after. They are remarkably alert. I call them my Praed Street Irregulars." He glanced at me quizzically. "Did not something in Mr. Harris's conversation give you pause, Parker?"

"Oh, nothing but his fidgeting. Why, the man carried on as if he feared he would be summarily dismissed if he took time to answer your questions."

"Yes, yes—but it was not that I had in mind. Did it not seem to you a little strange that a man like Teale Murchison should carry a good-luck piece?"

"Many people do."

"True. But surely it is inconsistent with the tenets of the Roman Catholic faith to put any trust in such charms and amulets as this?"

"I believe it is."

"And since we know that the late Murchison was a religious man, a manufacturer of Bibles, no less, this tale of his good-luck charm does not ring quite true."

"What are you getting at?"

"I submit that Mr. Harris's periapt was not designed as a good-luck charm at all."

Somewhat impatiently, I retorted that very clearly it was meant to be coin of the realm.

"Strange you should say so, Parker. Now, I had the distinct impression that the amulet was made up of two gold pieces, melted down—somewhat crudely, to be sure. Moreover, I submit that the amulet is not more than four months old at the most, and that it was made out of two of those gold pieces the late Murchison removed from his bank."

"How can you possibly make that assertion?"

"Ah, it is a simple matter of deduction, Parker."

"Well, it is quite beyond me."

"Indeed, it is so elementary I hesitate to mention it."

But he offered no explanation, and I did not ask one, for it was manifest that he believed anyone alert and observant should have recognized his premises. So it was in silence that we mounted the steps of Number Seven and went up to our rooms.

We had hardly removed our light coats before there was a rush and a clatter on the stairs, coupled with Mrs. Johnson's indignantly raised voice; the door was thrown open without ceremony, and young Alfred burst into the room, followed pell-mell by a trio of grinning urchins.

"Here we are, Mr. Pons!" cried Alfred, closing the door and marching up to the table, followed by his companions, who ranged themselves in a row beside him.

"So I see," replied Pons. "It is a mystery to me how you can manage to act so quickly, Alfred—even to the extent of having a little bread with jelly before you came. Yes, there at the corner of your mouth, my boy."

While he spoke, Pons went about gravely taking from his pocket four guineas, which he placed in a neat row at the edge of the table. Four pairs of bright, eager eyes watched him with keen interest.

"Now, then," continued Pons, standing before them. "How many of you have cycles?"

Two hands went up.

"Good. Two will carry the four of you. I have a little errand I want you to do. For the next three hours I want you to watch a house in South Norwood. There are four people of interest to me. The fifth I know. I want you to watch everything these people do, put down where they go, and come back here by six o'clock. Then these guineas will belong to you. Listen to me carefully."

Thereupon he repeated almost word for word the excellent description of his relatives given us by Mr. Sidney Harris, our recent client; and, so armed, the boys descended the stairs with the same clatter and banging which had accompanied their arrival. Pons, appearing well pleased with himself, rubbed his hands in satisfaction and gazed over at me with a twinkle in his eyes.

"The lads are far less likely to excite suspicion than you or I might be. And these are onerous details."

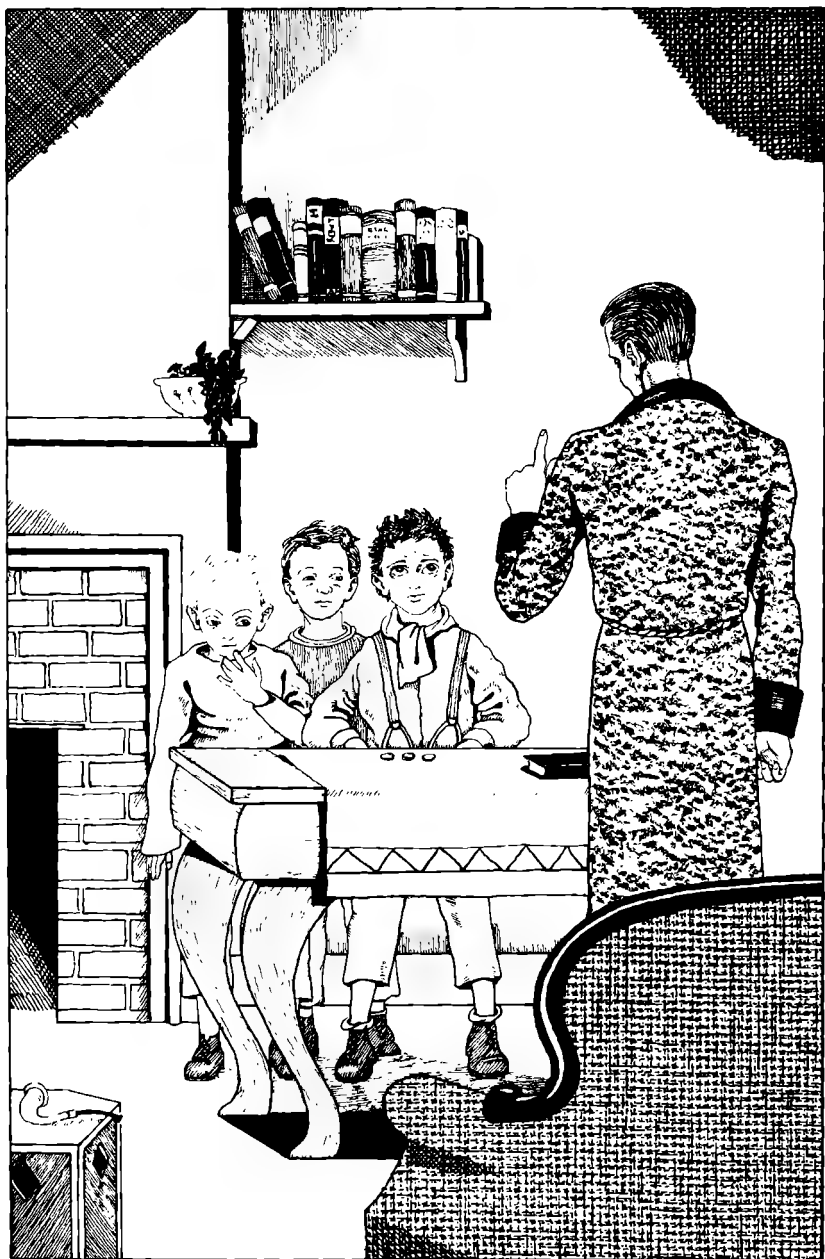
"It would seem to me that Harris might have told you what you wanted to know."

"Not he. No, no, Parker, he is too trusting. He sees no evil, hears none, and plainly believes little. We must have some unbiased comment on these people, and I am sure we shall get it from the 'Irregulars.' "

Promptly on the hour set, the boys returned.

As their acknowledged leader, Alfred instructed them, one after the other, to make their reports. The smallest lad, a red-haired boy called "Pinky," had been detailed to observe Harris's sister, who had emerged once in late afternoon to go shopping. Pinky did not have a high opinion of the lady, for he observed that she quarreled with the greengrocer about the price of vegetables. She was also seen to manifest her insatiable curiosity by peering into windows of the neighbouring houses. She gabbled for a long time with another woman out shopping, and the boy had crept close enough to overhear the two ladies energetically gossiping about a third. The second lad kept his eye out for the old man, Harris's father; he had come home from the house of a friend, and was clearly enough an ailing man. A husky lad had pushed him home in a wheel-chair, and the old man had given him a coin of some kind; he had seemed very friendly and bore very well the immediate scolding set up by his daughter.

The third lad had watched for Richard Murchison, who had arrived home from his work shortly after four o'clock. He was a boyish young fellow, and shortly after he had gone into the house, he came back out once more carrying a letter, which he read. "It was a love letter," said the lad scornfully.





"Ah, indeed! How could you tell, Peter?"

" 'E 'ad such a silly grin, 'e did, all the time 'e was a-readin' it. Then 'e picked a flower and 'eld it under 'is nose, 'e set down on the kerb and read the letter twice over."

"Ah, observant lad! Poor Richard is a second time bitten in the same place."

Clearly the lad had no good opinion of Richard for his being in love.

Alfred, however, had the longest tale to tell. He had watched Harris's brother, whose name, he had discovered, was Charles. Charles had been at home when the boys arrived, but he did not stay there long. He went down the street some distance to a pub; there he sat for some time scribbling on the back of an envelope. Then he went to a library in the neighbourhood and came out whistling. He went back to the pub and bought drinks for the three or four men in the place at that time. He did a little more calculating and writing on the edge of a newspaper. He crumpled up one of the papers on which he had been writing and threw it away as he came out of the pub; Alfred had rescued it, and now handed it to Pons, who took it eagerly and unfolded it.

"Ah, Mr. Charles's new suit is ready, his tailor writes, 'but please, sir, to come with the money to pay for it in advance.' " He looked up. "Evidently Charles is living on his future."

"That's all, Mr. Pons," said Alfred.

"Well done, boys! And there are your guineas. Now be off with you."

There was a chorus of "Thank you, sir!" and once again that mad clatter on the stairs, followed by Mrs. Johnson's portentous sighs, made pointedly loud from below, so that Pons and I would be sure to hear.

"Mrs. Johnson bears her cross well," observed Pons. "Well, Parker, what do you make of it?"

"Frankly, nothing."

"Oh, it is not as bad as that. I fancy Charles is the man we want. I have no doubt he overheard his brother say he meant to have a bath, and slipped back into the house to take the periapt while Sidney was in his bath. He had begun to wonder about the periapt. That he did not get it back before Sidney came out again was very likely a miscalculation on his part."

"Oh, come, Pons! How is it possible from these lads' tales to deduce that?"

"Why, it is a process of simple elimination. Harris's father and



sister are clearly out of it; his cousin is in love, and between his work and his romance—his addiction to romance, you will remember, was responsible for the rift between his father and himself—he has little time for such calculations which plainly occupy the mind of Mr. Charles Harris."

"What are those figures on the envelope?"

"They are calculations concerning the probable state of Mr. Charles Harris's finances, if he can riddle himself into riches. He does not seem to be a poor man, for all that there is no evidence of his having saved money." He threw the letter carelessly to the table and got up. "But come, Parker, we have but an hour or two until darkness to get on with it."

Mystified, I got into my overcoat, and set out with Pons for the street below, where we walked for a short distance before Pons managed to hail a cab. We got in, and Pons gave the driver the address of our destination. It was not South Norwood. It was beyond London, past the outlying districts of the city.

"I thought it was Charles we were after," I said pointedly.

"Dear me, no. Charles is the man who purloined the periapt. We are done with him unless he has more wit than I credit him with. As to that, we shall see in good time. We are off to look over Mr. Teale Murchison's country-house."

"Yes, that is a matter I meant to ask about. What the devil did you mean by telling such a fabrication to Harris?"

"Ah, you know my methods, Parker. Ponder them."

Pons sat back and relaxed, his eyes half-closed. Swallowing my chagrin, I did likewise.

In a little over an hour, we were delivered at a fine old country estate, clearly at one time the property of a wealthy man. Pons instructed the driver to wait, and we walked up a flagstone path under a gracious avenue of trees to the front door, a heavy, paneled piece with bronze finishings. Pons fished from his pocket the key Harris had given him, inserted it into the lock, and opened the door.

"I take it you are looking for something specific," I said as we entered the house.

"Capital! Parker. Indeed I am. I am looking for a seven-branched candelabrum. Or perhaps seven lamps. But I rather fancy it will be a seven-branched candelabrum, after all."

My astonishment did not permit me to reply.

"Let me see—where are we most likely to find such an ornament? The study, perhaps, or the library. Let us just look around."

We went down the hall, peering into one room after another, Pons somewhat in the lead.

"Hm! Surely this looks like it, does it not, Parker?"

We entered a small library, packed with books on all walls save the wall to our left as we entered; that wall opened on to a fireplace, and, above the mantelpiece, one on each side, were affixed two seven-branched candelabra, wired for electricity. I gazed in amazement, for I knew that Pons had never before entered this house, nor had Harris in any way described it except in the most general terms.

"I fancy this is the room we want," said Pons tranquilly.

"How in the devil did you know these candelabra were here?"

"Oh, I did not know they were in this room, Parker. You credit me with too much knowledge. But it was almost inevitable they were somewhere on this estate; surely that was manifest from the beginning!" He turned to look at the candelabra. "I daresay that switch over there controls the lights. Try it, Parker."

I did so, and the candelabra glowed with a soft, yellow light.

"Excellent!" murmured Pons, turning on his heels, his back to the candelabra. "And here on this wall, I fancy, we will find what we are looking for. Let us just examine these books a bit. The light falls here, well above the floor."

He stood back from the shelves and looked the books over without touching them. The contents of the shelves before us were what one might expect of a manufacturer of Bibles; they were ancient, worn tomes of considerable size, and certainly of great weight, apparently of no especial value save as curios, for they were, on closer examination of their scarcely legible titles, old variations of, and commentaries on the Scriptures. Without further study, Pons moved forward, opened the case, and began to turn over the books, taking them from the shelves until he came to a set of four of the largest books which were especially encased and were among those quaint old books which bore locks.

"Hal!" he cried. "I fancy we shall want these, Parker. If you will take two of them, I will take the other two."

I picked them up, and found them as weighty as I had expected. "I am by no means anti-religious, but these Scriptures are as heavy as lead."

"Spoken like a true sinner, Parker."

I laughed and carried on.

Pons carefully locked the door. We got into the cab, and rode back to London, reaching our lodgings before ten o'clock. Pons lost no time in going at once to the telephone and asking our recent client, Sidney Harris, to step around. Then he went calmly to the wireless and turned on the news, to which he listened with unbroken attention for the next half hour, thus effectively keeping me from asking the questions that welled up inside me with insistent urgency.

In less than an hour, Mr. Sidney Harris arrived. He had cycled over, and he rang our doorbell with an uncertainty that reflected his feelings. Pons stepped to the door, opened it, and called down to invite Harris up. He entered the room with perplexity plainly evident on his features; he was completely at a loss to know why my friend, Solar Pons, had sent for him, and there was manifest also some apprehension, very possibly because he feared Pons had decided after all to ask a fee for his services.

"Come in, come in, my dear Mr. Harris! I have a little matter that requires your attention. First of all, the key to your late uncle's house. I believe the house would be far more suitable for occupation by your bride and yourself."

Harris goggled at Pons as he took the key and mechanically attached it once more to his key-ring. "I'm sorry," he managed to say. "We are hoping to sell it."

"I fancy that will not be necessary." Pons walked with a cat-like agility around the table, took up one of the ponderous tomes he had brought from the Murchison house, slipped it from its case, and pried open the lock. "Pray overlook the liberties I am taking with your property, Mr. Harris, but I believe your uncle intended you to follow this course."

As he spoke, the book fell open with a dull sound, and there lay revealed not an orthodox book at all, but a cleverly made dummy, into the pages of which had been laid row on row of gold pieces!

"My Lord in Heaven!" exclaimed Harris, staring open-mouthed.

"Ah yes, these gold pieces are quite real, believe me, my dear fellow! There are four volumes of them. I discovered them precisely where your late uncle said they would be."

Harris, who had taken a tentative step or two forward, hesitated once more and stared at Pons with that strange mixture of uncer-

tainty and respect which my friend never failed to command by these casual announcements of his remarkable deductions.

"My uncle?" he said, passing his tongue over his dry lips.

"Indeed, yes. He left the word for you as plainly as he could in his determination to tax your ingenuity. I fear he had no very great respect either for your knowledge of Scripture or your imagination. I fancy, too, he had a good time exercising his own ingenuity and wit by setting out to distribute his wealth and ending up by concealing the bulk of it for you to find. Your inheritance was precisely where the late Mr. Murchison wrote that it would be—opposite the seven-branched candelabrum, where the light fell on the north wall of his library."

Harris sat down nervously. "I am afraid this is quite beyond me, Mr. Pons. I am all a-tremble."

"Dear me! Pray pull yourself together. You are wealthy, Mr. Harris. No more will you need to cycle to work daily, and no longer will you need to put off your wedding. But, come, let me explain the puzzle to you. Have you your uncle's periapt?"

Wordlessly, Harris produced the curious object.

"Herein lies the solution of the matter," continued Pons. "I apprehend neither you nor my estimable companion knows his Scripture well. Attend me: *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. Numbers: 8, 2.*" He looked up, his keen eyes narrowed. "Now, then, think: what is the source of that quotation?"

Harris swallowed and answered uncertainly. "Is it not from the Sermon on the Mount?"

"Capital! Capital! Of course it is, Mr. Harris. But what then, is it doing in *Numbers*, which is in the Old Testament?"

Harris began to look a little foolish, and I have no doubt I too looked as foolish as I felt.

"There you have it. The quotation is from Matthew: 7.7., the Douay version, which is the version of Scriptures preferred by members of the Roman Catholic faith. Clearly, then, Mr. Murchison meant you to seek and find, and he told you at least initially where to look. Let us turn to Numbers: 8.2."

As he spoke, he lifted from his shelves the Bible in question, turned over a little more than a hundred pages, and read aloud:

*"Speak to Aaron, and thou shalt say to him: When thou shalt place the seven lamps, let the candlestick be set up on the south side. Give orders therefore that the lamps look over against the*

*north, towards the table of the loaves of proposition, over against that part shall they give light, towards which the candlestick looketh. — Surely that is plain enough!"*

At that, Mr. Sidney Harris found his voice. He came to his feet, seized Pons's hand, and began to shake it in the sudden expression of his joy. "Mr. Pons, I owe you more than I can pay you. You have given me a new life, indeed, you have!"

"On the contrary, my dear fellow — it is I who owe you a debt of gratitude for bringing to my attention one of the most intriguing problems in many months. And, by the way, if I were you I should not permit natural generosity to make it unnecessary for brother Charles to get himself a suitable position and learn to work."

## *The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive*

EARLY ONE MORNING during the fourth year of my residence in the quarters of my friend, Solar Pons, the private inquiry agent, I was startled from sleep by a commanding assault on the outer door of No. 7B, Praed Street. I jumped out of bed, groped into my dressing-gown and slippers, and came out of my room hoping to anticipate my companion, for he had sat up late assembling certain facts relative to my notes concerning the dramatic adventure of the Haunted Library.

But Pons had preceded me. Indeed, he was even now turning from the window, his keen grey eyes alight with expectation. Clad in his purple dressing-gown and velvet slippers, he stood rubbing his hands together in that habit he had, and favoured me with a light smile.

"Ah, he has wakened you, too, Parker," he said. "I had hoped to prevent his disturbing Mrs. Johnson, but she sleeps like a cat and wakens at the slightest sound. If the matter is commensurate with the to-do which announces it, I fear we shall be asked to look into a formidable problem."

"It is surely no night to be out," I said. "It is still raining."

"But the fog, I think, is thinner," answered Pons.

"Was there a car below?" I asked. "I saw you looking out."

"A limousine. But there are two people on the stairs, and one, unless I am grievously in error, is our old friend Jamison."

The door was tapped upon, and, at Pons's reply, thrown open.

Inspector Jamison loomed behind a portly figure of considerable presence. Our client was a man of perhaps sixty summers, with closely-cropped greying hair, keen dark eyes, and a square, impressive jaw dominated by a wide, thick-lipped mouth. His appearance, however, was that of a man who had undergone but recently events of a most upsetting nature. Without waiting for Inspector Jamison's introduction, he strode toward Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he said, extending his hand gravely.

"Sir Ernest McVeagh, I believe," replied Pons. "Director of the Great Northern Railway, as well as of several other corporations of considerable importance to the Empire."

"I trust you can forgive this unseemly and untimely interruption of your rest. . . ."

"Think nothing of it, sir. I observe you, too, were aroused from your own bed by the events which have brought you here. Pray allow me, sir—your waistcoat is buttoned askew."

"It is of no consequence, Mr. Pons. Let us waste no time in coming to the point," said our visitor in some agitation. "One of our locomotives has vanished."

The light quickened in my companion's eyes. "From the round-house or the line?"

"From the line!"

Pons's eyes fairly danced. "The details?"

"At ten-thirty last evening, a gentleman who gave his name as James H. Mason appeared at our district manager's office; he represented himself as having but recently arrived at Croydon from New York. He stated that it was urgently necessary for him to be in Sheffield at the earliest possible moment, preferably before dawn, certainly not later than ten o'clock. All air travel had been canceled because of heavy weather; he had been unable to hire a car to take him so far from London; he had missed the fast train to Sheffield; so he had come as a last resort to implore our arrangement of a special train or locomotive to transport him to Sheffield. Money was apparently no object. Since he carried but a dispatch case, we were naturally curious to know something more about him. He was unusually reticent, but he disclosed that he had registered at Bohn's; inquiry soon corroborated his statement. He had remained in his room only long enough to deposit a bag, which Scotland Yard has impounded."

Inspector Jamison's rubicund face managed a smile and he nodded gravely. "Nothing in it," he said. "That is, nothing that would tell us much about him, except that he appeared to be in the legal profession."

Our client continued. "His request was a most unusual one. It was not impossible for us to transport him to Sheffield, however costly the operation might be. As he made clear, he did not quibble at the cost of a special, nor did he object when he was informed that it might be impossible to make up a special at such short notice, but that a locomotive and carriage was available for his use as soon as we could find a driver and fireman to man it. It would take at least an hour to clear the line and make the necessary arrangements; he chafed at this delay, but did not stir from the office while arrangements were being made.

"As a matter of record, our registry number 177 left Euston Station at eleven-thirty-seven; it had to run on a very close schedule, of course; for at least part of the way a slow passenger train followed, and the line had been cleared only for the time necessary to make the special run. Each station, therefore, had been informed of the approximate hour of Number 177's passing, with instructions to wire the central office as soon as it had gone by, so that we might be fully informed in regard to its keeping on schedule. Wires accordingly came in at the expected intervals, with Number 177 running on time, until the locomotive had passed Girton, which is approximately seventy miles from London. The next station on the line is Kendon-on-Lea; it is just fourteen miles beyond Girton. Since the special was traveling at about seventy miles an hour, it should have passed through Kendon-on-Lea in ten minutes or so after it had gone through Girton.

"But there was no wire from the station-master at Kendon-on-Lea. There was no further announcement of the special's passing whatsoever. The central office immediately dispatched an inquiry to Kendon-on-Lea; Jeffries, the station-master there, replied by wire that the special had not yet passed. Within half an hour came another wire from Jeffries reporting the passing, on schedule, of the slow train which had been following the special. Naturally, since there had been no report of an accident, the superintendent thought that there had been remissness or an error somewhere along the line; at least the special might have left the rails sufficiently far to have escaped the notice of the engineer of the following train.

"At the superintendent's instructions, therefore, a party of inquiry was sent back along the line to Girton. Mr. Pons, despite the most diligent search, no trace of the locomotive could be found. The only certain facts were that the special had gone through Girton but had not reached Kendon-on-Lea. Subsequently, however, the fireman, Stanley Meybreck, was found wandering in a dazed condition in the vicinity of Chadwick, the station before Girton on the up-run; and only twenty minutes before we set out for your address, the engine-driver telephoned from Chisborough; he had found a telegram announcing the collapse and imminent death of his father waiting for him at Chadwick, together with a substitute driver, and had gone rushing off only to discover that nothing had happened to his parent. It would seem that some premeditation is thus indicated, though it is puzzling to believe, and even more perplexing to explain.



"That, Mr. Pons, is the sum and substance of this extraordinary affair. We communicated at once with Scotland Yard, and Inspector Jamison has been working diligently since that time. Though he has not been on the scene, the tracks between Girton and Kendon-on-Lea have been examined with the most minute care, and so have the branch-lines, though only two of them are any longer in use."

"How many are there?" asked Pons.

"Three. One leads to a colliery, another to a mine, the third to a goods-yard owned by the line but abandoned some time ago to a salvage company."

Pons glanced toward Jamison. "You have had reports on the branch-lines?"

"Of course," said Jamison with self-assurance. "The colliery line is clear; there is nothing on it, and the staff at the colliery report no disturbance on the line. The line to the mine ends in buffer-stops; that has not been disturbed; it too is clear. The other branch is no longer even connected to the main line; the tracks for a short distance from the points were taken up two years ago."

Pons sat for some moments in deep silence, his head sunk upon his chest, the fingers of his left hand toying with his ear.

"A locomotive can hardly vanish into thin air," he observed presently.

"Elementary, my dear Pons," said Jamison heavily.

Pons smiled.

"The fact is," continued Jamison, "that is exactly what it did do. It passed Girton; it did not reach Kendon-on-Lea. It did not return through Girton; it did not go forward through Kendon-on-Lea. The through train which followed met no obstacle on the line between Girton and Kendon-on-Lea. I believe it was you who once said that if the possible explanations are shown to be inadequate, then the only remaining explanation, however untenable, must be true. The locomotive has disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed it up."

"Let me see. There are no tarns, canals, lakes along the line," mused Pons.

Jamison smiled with an annoyingly superior air. "My dear fellow, that was the first thing we thought of. We are not amateurs."

"'Pity 'tis, 'tis true,'" murmured Pons. "But the locomotive is not in London; so a visit to the scene of the crime is indicated."

"We can arrange for a special for you, Mr. Pons," said our client.

"I hardly think it will be necessary. There is surely some train on

its regular run that will convey us to Girton. From there, we shall enlist such services as you may direct your staff at that station to lend us. We shall need a light engine and carriage to go out over the line."

"The next train leaves Euston in scarcely half an hour, Mr. Pons," said Sir Ernest with some anxiety.

"We shall be on it," promised Pons.

Our client was somewhat uncertain, but in his anxiety he could not afford to disregard any proposal Pons might put forth. An examination of the ground was inevitable in the circumstances; that Pons intended no delay could not but please Sir Ernest McVeagh. If Inspector Jamison was dubious, he masked his dubiety well; still, there lingered in his eyes an almost triumphant smile, as if to say that this time, certainly, my companion's much-vaunted powers would not help him.

"We shall give you every assistance in our power, Mr. Pons," said Sir Ernest.

After our client and the portly Inspector Jamison had taken their leave, Pons threw himself into the feverish activity attendant upon our departure for the north. Throughout our rapid preparations, Pons said not a word. Yet he made ready with the keenest anticipation; the problem Sir Ernest McVeagh had brought him was one which intrigued him, and even the prospect of going out into so unpleasant a night did not dismay him. Not until we were safely ensconced in the compartment of the train which was to take us to the north did Pons speak.

He looked quizzically over at me, his left eyebrow raised.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

"Well, it is obviously moonshine," I said. "A locomotive simply can't disappear without a trace."

"Yet it seems to have done so," retorted Pons. "I am afraid our good Inspector Jamison has proceeded on the theory that you have just advanced, that the locomotive did not actually vanish. Let us, on the contrary, assume that it did; it is no more difficult to adduce an explanation for the one as for the other, whatever Jamison may believe."

"Very well, then," I said, nettled. "Perhaps it was lifted off the line from the air."

Pons, however, did not smile. "Until we have evidence to the contrary, no theory, no matter how absurd it may seem, can be discarded. I fear, in view of the attendant weather, that an air-lift

is out of the question. Let us ask ourselves what possible motive could there be for causing the special locomotive to vanish."

"Mason needed it."

"Ah, now we are being facetious," said Pons, wagging a finger at me in admonition.

"Well, Pons, I am no good at this sort of thing," I replied. "I should like to hear your explanation."

"Ah, it is beyond my poor powers at this point. But I submit one or two little aspects of the problem for your consideration. The object of the disappearance, I think we are safe in taking it, was not the locomotive, but its passenger."

"Mason?"

"James H. Mason, an American. Now, I submit that is a significant detail. He is not a tourist, for his course is fixed and purposeful. He is evidently a man of means, but he prefers to travel alone; he registers at a hotel like Bohn's, instead of one of the larger and costlier hostelries, where he might be more easily seen. We are not far wrong, I fancy, in assuming that he would like to keep himself as unobtrusive as possible. He is a man with a mission; he must get to Sheffield as early as possible, at least by ten o'clock. Why ten o'clock?"

"He has an appointment," I ventured.

"But would not an appointee wait upon an envoy come from so great a distance? I am afraid, Parker, that if our Mr. Mason flew to England to be in Sheffield at ten o'clock, this was a mission which could not be delayed. Very well, then, what sort of mission might it be? That, too, is not difficult to guess."

"You know?" I demanded incredulously.

"In matters of this kind, one can make certain deductions. I rather think they are not wide of the mark. Sheffield is an industrial city, and I daresay there are important meetings held in that city every day. Does not the hour, ten o'clock, suggest some kind of business meeting?"

"It does."

"Just hand me the *Financial Times*, will you?"

He took the paper and studied its columns. But he was not long in finding what he sought.

"Ah, I fancy this is what we want. 'Northern Steel Stockholders Meeting.' The hour is ten o'clock, in the office of the President of the corporation. I submit, Parker, that a stockholders' meeting is not to be delayed by the non-arrival of such stockholders as are in-

terested enough to want to attend. Such a meeting could hardly be postponed by any other means than a majority vote of the stockholders themselves."

I pondered for some moments what my companion intended to suggest. "But who would have any reason to want to prevent the American's attendance?" I protested. "After all, if it is a matter of votes, he is but one man against a certain majority."

"Ah, you are back on the air-lift," said Pons dryly.

"And, if it were meant to abduct him, what possible excuse could there be for waiting until he got so far out of London?"

"Oh, that is elementary indeed, Parker. It must surely be obvious even to you with a little thought."

"It is very easy to brush my objections aside, Pons," I said. "That is not answering them."

"They answer themselves if only you will give yourself time enough to think about them."

With this, Pons turned to the front page of *The Times*.

"There is nothing in the paper," I said. "I looked."

"So I see. I observe, however, a paragraph on corporate difficulties in Northern Steel. 'Lord Delapoer, Chairman of the Board, has indicated that he anticipates no change in the policies which the Board has followed in the administration of the Northern Steel, despite the agitation of Balfour Danals, who is, according to Lord Delapoer, only a minority stockholder.'" Pons lowered the paper and gazed thoughtfully over at me. "That suggests nothing to you, Parker?"

"Nothing."

He smiled fleetingly, folded the paper, and threw it down. "My concern at the moment is primarily about the locomotive," he went on. "I am satisfied about Mason, but the locomotive perplexes me."

"I am surprised to hear it."

"I don't wonder. Of course, it is evident that it was taken over one of the three branch-lines of the road between Girton and Kendon-on-Lea. I daresay we shall discover which one in due time."

He lapsed into silence and sat with his head sunk upon his chest, his eyes closed, his restless fingers beating a tattoo on the arm of the seat. In this fashion he traveled into the dawn to our arrival in mid-morning at Girton where a special investigator for the Great Northern awaited us in the company of the station-master.

The investigator, a rotund, red-cheeked man in his late middle

years, introduced himself as Robinson Melward. The station-master was a transplanted Cockney, James Byron, who looked very harassed and tired at the moment of our arrival, though the presence of Solar Pons seemed to stimulate him to renewed wakefulness, and he was eager to explain his role, however negative, in the puzzling problem of the missing locomotive.

"I seen her go by, like I reported; I sent in my report by wire, and first thing I knew there was the home office calling for more information. Had I seen her go back? No, sir, I had not. Then the wires begun to come hot and heavy, and first thing you know the regular went through. So I reported that and everything broke loose. Next thing I know Mr. Melward arrived, and a detective-inspector assigned from London, and the lot of us couldn't find a trace of old 177 anywhere."

Pons did nothing to stem his loquacity, which did not last long, for he was obliged to telephone up and down the line in order to ascertain that traffic would be slowed and warned of our presence on the line. Then we set out, leaving the assistant station-master in charge at Girton. Our conveyance was not the light engine suggested but a motor-driven car, similar in construction to a hand-car, but shielded on three sides from wind and weather, with an open back, allowing for freedom of movement to and from the car.

The rain had ceased, but a fine mist stung our faces despite the slowness of our progress along the line. Pons was so constantly off the car, examining the road-bed, that he might as well have walked the distance. The first branch to which we came found us shunted off the main line.

"The regular from the north is due down," explained Byron. "We'll just wait here."

Pons looked along the length of the line, which vanished into a denser mist.

"Which of the three branches is this, Mr. Byron?" he asked.

"It goes in to the Green Star Colliery, Mr. Pons. Not much used. Just for the coal-trucks now and then. The seam's about petered out."

A locomotive's whistle sounded from the north, and in a moment the rumble of an approaching train rose out of the mist.

"Here she comes," said Byron with a proprietary air. He looked at his watch. "Right on time, too."

The train which swept by was evidently the night express from

Scotland, for it included several sleepers. While we were watching it pass, my companion vanished along the dense, foggy branch-line.

"No need to walk, Mr. Pons," said Byron. "We can take the car in."

Forthwith he started up the car. We caught up to Pons, who was running along the line, bent and hunched in an almost ape-like manner, peering intently from one side of the line to the other, as if he hoped to discover some evidence that previous investigation had failed to disclose. In this fashion we reached the mine itself, and the car stopped at a buffer-stop across the line. This Pons examined with singular intentness, observing the mouth of the mine yawning blackly ahead.

"We thought it might be large enough for a locomotive to get into," said Melward, observing Pons's interest. "But the plain fact is the buffers haven't been moved. The mine-police were here all the time; there's one over there right now if you want to talk to him."

Melward beckoned the police-officer toward the car. He was a heavy-set man, with a porcine face which was set and determined; his aspect was unfriendly. Pons gazed at him intently; a little smile touched his lean lips.

"Porker Kelvay, isn't it," he said. "On your good behaviour now, eh?"

The policeman backed away.

"Nothing happen here last night, Porker?" asked Pons.

"Nothing, Mr. Pons. I swear to God, Mr. Pons, that's the straight of it. That's the way it was. I was here. . . ."

Pons swung up to the car once more and directed Byron to go ahead, leaving Kelvay to stand open-mouthed behind him.

Melward was immediately curious. "You know that man?"

"He served a brief term for assault and robbery ten years ago," said Pons. "I appeared against him."

We returned to the main line and went along as before. There was no sign that the mist was altering in density; it grew neither thicker nor any less dense. The humid air was strongly aromatic; briefly, after the passing of the train from the north, of the acrid smoke from the locomotive; thereafter of the dampened landscape, of water and earth.

Pons continued to move off and back on to the car. At the second branch he repeated his examination, going into the mine it served, and marking the semi-abandonment of the line, which came to a

dead-end, and had evidently not been used for some time. Then once again we waited on the spur for a slow train to pass from the south.

At last we reached the place on the line to which the Company's siding had been extended. Byron would have gone on to Kendon-on-Lea, had not Pons interposed objection.

"What were those points we passed, Mr. Byron?"

"Tracks taken up a year or two ago, sir."

"All the way?"

"No, sir — just part."

"Let us just have a look at them."

Byron obediently reversed the car and we returned to the points.

Pons sprang off. He examined the earth about the switch with great care and then the points themselves.

"They have been oiled recently," he said.

Byron agreed that it was possible the points had been oiled. "The men come along and oil them the same as always. You gets into a kind of habit, you might say."

"The abandoned yards lie over in this direction, I take it?" asked Pons.

"Yes, sir."

"How far?"

"Oh, just around that bend. A mile, hardly more."

"Let us take the car off the line and leave it while we walk over to the yards."

"We have been there, Mr. Pons," said Melward, faintly re-proving.

"Doubtless. If it is all the same to you, however, I will have a look for myself."

We bent to it and swung the car off the line and left it. Then, with Byron leading the way, vociferous in his perplexity at Pons's wish to examine the abandoned yards, we made our way to the sidings, which were far more extensive than we had imagined.

Here we found a virtual graveyard for outmoded and worn equipment which waited to be broken up for scrap. Quite clearly, in one part of the sidings, a salvage-firm had been breaking up equipment, for a wagonload of scrap-iron waited to be moved. Meanwhile, however, the lines in the siding were occupied by goods-wagons, low-loaders, and even three engines.

"These locomotives do not look worn out to me," said Pons.

"One can see you're not a railway man, Mr. Pons," said Melward

good-naturedly. "These locomotives have been here for some time, and they are ready to be broken up. Look at this one—this is old number 169. Over here is 305, and there is 729. All ready for the scrap-pile."

"And who undertakes their disposal?"

"That is out of my department, Mr. Pons. A scrap-iron company has taken over everything in these yards. Whenever they break up an engine, we are notified so that our registry shows its ultimate disposal. I think even you will admit that it would be impossible to break up a locomotive like this in the interval since its disappearance; it could not be done."

"Perhaps not impossible, Mr. Melward," replied Pons imper-turbably. "But I concede it is highly improbable. One ought not to confuse the impossible with the improbable."

So saying, Pons went from one to another of the locomotives, popping in and out of the cabs. Melward looked wordlessly from Byron to me, restraining his astonishment with difficulty. In the grey morning the flickering of Pons's torch could be seen from time to time. When he came back to where we waited presently, he offered no explanation of his curiosity.

"I don't know what you may be thinking, Mr. Pons," said Melward. "But these three locomotives have been here for quite a time. Their numbers check with those in our reports; no locomotive has been dismantled here for two months."

"Has anything at all been dismantled here recently?" pressed Pons.

"Nothing but three old carriages. Would you like to examine the rest of the rolling-stock?"

"I think not," replied Pons, with a smile. He took out his watch and consulted it. "We have made good time. But we shall have to make better. When is the next train due for the north?"

"To what place, Mr. Pons?"

"Sheffield."

"Within half an hour. If we hurry, we can just make Kendon-on-Lea, Mr. Pons," said Byron.

"Then by all means let us hurry."

For the remainder of the distance to Kendon-on-Lea, Pons gave but scant attention to the line. He seemed to be preoccupied, and stood with his hands clasped behind his back, his head lowered into the now thinning mist, his eyes extremely thoughtful.

We reached Kendon-on-Lea just in time to catch the northbound



train. We had but a few moments to quit the car, obtain tickets, and bid farewell to Melward and Byron, who were to return to Gorton as soon as the northbound train had passed. The through train came in, halted through the good offices of Oscar Jeffries, the station-master at Kendon-on-Lea; we boarded it, and were off.

"According to the timetable," said Pons, "we should reach Sheffield at about eleven o'clock."

"I confess I am at a loss to know why we are going to Sheffield," I began cautiously. "If the locomotive could not have reached London, it could hardly have reached Sheffield."

"That is an excellent deduction, Parker," answered Pons, his keen eyes twinkling. "No, it is not the locomotive we are now seeking; it is its missing passenger."

"I am afraid you have the advantage of me."

"Surely not by much, Parker. Certain facts are salient. Let us consider that it was clearly intended that Mason should not reach the stockholders' meeting of Northern Steel. It is not too far-fetched to assume that no matter what means Mason used to reach Sheffield, his enemies would have made certain that he did not reach his goal. That presupposes the most elaborate planning, to take care of any contingency, for we cannot doubt but that Mason was shadowed from the moment he landed at Croydon. Such preparations, in turn, suggest that if money was no object to Mason, it was even less so to his enemies. Powerful men involved in a jousting for power, Parker.

"No matter, then, what avenue to Sheffield Mason took, his enemies were prepared. If he came by car, I have no doubt he would have been abducted even sooner. If he came by the regular train, can you question but that the determined men who oppose him would have managed somehow to take him? As soon as it was evident that he was traveling by special train, the information was passed on to the particular team detailed to take care of this contingency. That team would have to take care of such little niceties as luring the engine-driver from the locomotive and substituting one of their own men with forged credentials, as well as of knocking out the fireman and throwing him from the locomotive, to say nothing of the actual removal of the locomotive itself, by way of tracks laid down and then taken up again."

"You suggest that a large number of people have been employed in this venture."

"I submit that it could not have been done otherwise. Consider,

no one could know in advance just how Mason would attempt to reach Sheffield. Every possible contingency would of necessity have to be covered. Since that is true, a large number of people must necessarily be employed. Such employment, in turn, suggests that a very large sum of money is at the disposal of the engineers of this daring plan. I think we shall find that Mason was serving in the capacity of a far more important emissary than our friend, Jamison, for instance, conceives."

Pons said no more. He sat the rest of the way to Sheffield in complete relaxation, his eyes closed. At the station in Sheffield he dismounted with alacrity, hailed a cab, and gave the address of the building in which the stockholders' meeting of Northern Steel was presumably now in progress.

"Surely Mason is not there!"

"Just as surely someone there is in a position to lead us to him, unless murder too has been done."

"By what means do you hope to find him, Pons? This is rash."

"Frontal assault, my dear Parker. There are circumstances in which no other course is possible—or desirable."

At the Northern Steel building, Pons asked for Lord Delapoer, representing the nature of his business as urgent. In the face of an adamant clerk, Pons wrote a brief note, and sent it by the clerk's hand into the meeting.

Within a very few moments, an angry middle-aged man came bursting from the stockholders' meeting to confront Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons!" he exclaimed. "What is the meaning of this outrageous message?"

"Lord Delapoer," replied Pons. "Pray do not underrate my intelligence; I have not underrated yours. If my message had no bearing, it would not have seemed outrageous to you. Since it does seem so, it is manifestly pertinent."

"'In the matter of James H. Mason. All is known,' " read Lord Delapoer, his white moustache bristling still. "You have signed it."

"Let us not fence, your lordship. Either you will direct us to Mason by letter, which is in your power to do, or I will lay the facts before Scotland Yard and the newspapers. I am beyond the power of all the wealth in England."

Lord Delapoer gazed with stony fury into Pons's eyes; then he crumpled Pons's note and threw it to the floor. "Wait here," he said, and turned on his heel.

In a very short time another clerk appeared from the room into

which Lord Delapoer had vanished and brought Pons a letter enclosed in an envelope, addressed to Leopold Manadal at an address in Sheffield.

Once outside the building, Pons unceremoniously opened the envelope, and took out the note inside.

"Delapoer is likely to think that violence may dispose of us," he explained. "It is a possibility we cannot obviate." He read the note. "Ah, he has considered his position; he does not know, after all, how much we may already have disclosed. 'Admit the bearer to see Mason,' he writes, and signs it simply, 'Delapoer.' I daresay this will do."

In less than fifteen minutes we were being shown into a darkened room where a tall, broad-shouldered man lay bound and gagged on a bed. Despite the objection of his burly captor, a dark-skinned foreigner to whom Pons's note from Lord Delapoer had been given, Pons unceremoniously ripped the gag from Mason's mouth and cut his bonds.

"Permit me, Mr. Mason—Solar Pons, at your service. I fancy we are regrettably too late to save your proxies, but by an immediate appearance at the stockholders' meeting of Northern Steel you may yet avert Delapoer's coup. There is a cab below."

"What else could Mason have carried to make his absence from the meeting important save proxies from American stockholders who, like Balfour Danals over here, are dissatisfied with the present directorship?" explained Pons on the train back to London.

"Of course, now you have pointed it out, it is obvious."

"It was from the beginning," rejoined Pons. "No other explanation was tenable in the circumstances."

"But if I might be so bold," I went on, "it seems to me that the crux of the problem remains unsolved. Sir Ernest McVeagh will still want his locomotive."

"Ah, as for that, you laid eyes on it yourself earlier today, Parker. It stands in the company's abandoned yards as number 729—which is only number 177 renumbered, for these numerals lend themselves very easily to such an alteration in haste. The real number 729 was converted to scrap at the time that the company received a report of carriages having been cut up; I think you will find that Lord Delapoer's company also controls various plants for the accumulation and disposal of scrap-iron, and unquestionably the yards between Girton and Kendon-on-Lea are under the control of

Northern Steel. In foreseeing every contingency, the real 729 was cut down earlier.

"The locomotive could not, after all, have vanished into thin air. It was not sunk into a mine shaft, no tarn or lake offered itself for the convenience of Mason's enemies, and the locomotive was clearly not run back past Girton or on past Kendon-on-Lea. We have as yet no lorry large enough to load up and cart away an entire locomotive, and anything other than a lorry would have been obvious even in the darkest night. So there remained only the branch-lines along the road. And what more simple and efficacious than a locomotive yards, where the stolen locomotive might be left to stand in plain sight without being suspect?"

Three days after our search for the missing locomotive, Pons greeted me at breakfast with a marked copy of the *Financial Times*.

"Our little adventure has had an epilogue," he observed dryly.

I read the account he had marked for cutting. "Balfour Danals New Chairman of Northern Steel," read the small caption. The story itself was succinct and clear, though it failed to tell all.

"Following the dramatic appearance of James H. Mason, an attorney from New York City, representing American stockholders of Northern Steel, charging irregularities at the meeting three days ago, stockholders voted to hold a new meeting yesterday. As a result of the new meeting, Lord Delapoer lost the chairmanship of the Board of Directors to Balfour Danals, to whose supporters rallied Mr. Mason with proxies obtained by cable from American stockholders. . . ."

"And, if I am not mistaken, I daresay the new directors will soon expose gross mismanagement, if nothing more serious, under Delapoer. The loss of the chairmanship of itself could mean nothing if it were not for the possibility of damaging disclosures to follow."

Nor, as time and events made clear, was Pons in error, any more than he had been in any other aspect of the remarkable abduction of the Great Northern Railway's special locomotive.

## *The Adventure of the Five Royal Coachmen*

RETURNING from a professional call to the lodgings I shared with Solar Pons at 7B Praed Street, early one June morning in 1922, I was astonished to find my companion engaged in the contemplation of a fishing-rod. He stood in the centre of our sitting-room just away from the mantel and not far from his desk, flexing the rod in his long, supple fingers. At my entrance, he favoured me with a glance from his keen grey eyes and the ghost of a smile on his lips.

"I note your amazement, Parker," he said. "Let me assure you that my interest in matters piscatorial is not recent. Alas! I have but lacked the opportunity to try my hand at that ancient and honourable sport of angling. Come, what do you say to a holiday on the Test?"

"My dear Pons! You are surely joking!"

"Ah, I find too little opportunity for jesting. Now that I have concluded that little matter of the lost locomotive to the satisfaction of the directors of the Great Northern Railway, a holiday would not be amiss. The Test should be beautiful at this time of year. And the trout are rising. So, at least, the papers have it."

He tossed me a copy of a newspaper from his desk. It was folded to a brief account on the front page carrying the total catch taken a day ago by an angling party under the leadership of Sir Ronald Masterman, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

"But this is a record of the catch the day before yesterday," I protested. "Trout are unpredictable. What was yesterday's total?"

"Ah, the morning papers are remarkably silent in the matter."

I laughed. "You see! They took none. And it is now you talk of going trout-fishing!"

Pons put down the rod and took up his calabash, which he proceeded to fill with shag. "By the way," he said presently, "I am expecting a caller at any moment. Be so good as to admit him if he should arrive while I am in my room."

"Aha! I thought there was more to this than met the eye!" I exclaimed.

"Is there not always more to everything than meets the eye?"

So saying, he vanished into his chamber, leaving me to puzzle over whatever new venture engaged his attention, for my companion's reputation for the kind of confidential inquiry work in which he specialized had now spread far beyond the boundaries of metropolitan London. The year, as I recall it, was one of those hectic years in the decade following the Great War, when most of the capitals were uneasy still, and peace seemed but a temporary illusion.

Pons was back in our sitting-room when the bell jangled to announce the visitor he had been expecting. Pons's immobile features told me nothing, but there was a restrained air of anticipation in his bearing. Nevertheless, I was not prepared to greet a visitor of such distinction as the tall, broad-shouldered figure whose austere, bemonocled face was familiar to every Englishman and, indeed, to half the globe, as that of Lord Hilary Kilvert, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

He was brisk and singularly direct. With but a flickering glance for me, he inquired, "You received my message, Mr. Pons?"

"Pray be seated, Lord Kilvert. My companion, Dr. Lyndon Parker, is a man of utmost discretion; you may speak freely before him."

"I sincerely trust so." He took off his bowler, laid it unceremoniously on Pons's desk, and mopped his brow with his handkerchief, although I should not have called the room warm. "Forgive my not sitting down, I beg you. I am too restless, far too restless to sit still. The matter is one potentially fraught with the gravest possibilities—let me repeat, Mr. Pons, the gravest possibilities."

"Dear me, Lord Kilvert," observed Pons tranquilly, "I should not have thought that a commonplace angling excursion on the Test should occasion such concern even though it involves a few foreign diplomats under the guidance of the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs."

Lord Kilvert whirled on his feet and stared at Pons, his face ashen. "Good God! Mr. Pons," he exclaimed, "surely there has been no leak to the press?"

"Pray compose yourself," Pons hastened to assure him. "It seemed to me beyond the bounds of coincidence that your urgent call should be unrelated to the expedition duly chronicled in the papers three days ago and followed in detail daily thereafter until this morning when the matter is conspicuous by its absence from

the news columns. Surely it is not too much to suppose that some event took place which might have certain international complications?"

"Thank Heaven! I feared for a moment that some word of Spencer's disappearance had reached print."

"Ah, so it is young Rigby Spencer who has vanished! I submit, your lordship, that this much-touted angling expedition served only to cover events of considerably more significance to His Majesty's Government and to your office particularly. The members of the party were not minor diplomats, but special envoys empowered by their governments to conduct talks on a matter close to our government. If I may venture a guess—the disarmament question?"

"You are close, Mr. Pons. The precise subject was the ratio of naval disarmament. We may assume that certain foreign countries would be most anxious to obtain advance information on this subject before our government is ready to release any public statement."

"Specifically, Japan and Russia," said Pons crisply. "Let us hear the story as you know it, Lord Kilvert. If espionage is involved, there is no time to be lost. The game is already well afoot, and we are not yet set upon it."

Without ceasing his restless pacing to and fro, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs began to talk rapidly. "You should understand, Mr. Pons, that our government had fixed upon a certain basic ratio of naval disarmament some time ago; this had been arrived at after preliminary talks by representatives of the United States government. It was committed to a formula and entrusted to Rigby Spencer, precisely because we felt that any foreign agent interested in an attempt to obtain the formula and the ratio might reasonably suppose that Sir Ronald Masterman would be carrying it. Since we will not retreat from our basic ratio, but might well be able to obtain an even better ratio, we would lose all chance to bargain if once our basic ratio were known."

"We had inaugurated the meetings officially in London. After early talks, we permitted the press to report that we had taken a brief recess, ostensibly to wait for other delegates, and some of our number went trout-fishing on the Test from Chilbolton to Leckford, a lovely stretch of water, Mr. Pons, if you have ever had the good fortune to fish it. The party had its headquarters at an inn in Chilbolton, and journeyed from there every morning, well attended, with hampers of food and all the necessities."

"Of course, the gentlemen enjoyed the fishing; they were meant to do so; but each evening, and occasionally at luncheons, they proceeded with the talks. They made little progress. The American delegate was quite stubborn and did not have the freedom of action which most of the others exercised; the French delegate consistently pressed for every advantage without revealing his government's demurrers in a manifest attempt to force our hand; the Japanese delegate, suspecting that his country would be asked to accept a greater ratio of disarmament, was naturally reticent and suspicious. Thus, beneath the apparent smoothness of the talks and the quite evident pleasure the gentlemen shared in the angling, there existed a definite stratum of unrest.

"However, all went well until yesterday. There had been a violent disagreement in the course of talks at the inn the previous night; the Japanese delegate had left the meeting in anger, though he rejoined the party in the morning as blandly as if nothing untoward had taken place the night before. The party went in two motor-cars to that stretch of water which lies just above Leckford. The fishing, according to Masterman, was quiet at first; some trout rose, but not many. The day was grey with an overcast; rain impended. The party separated in mid-morning and did not come together again until luncheon. There was some discussion as to the advisability of returning to Chilbolton; they voted on it, but, though there were three votes for returning, the majority of the party were for continuing. Just before noon, the fish had begun to rise to the bait, and enthusiasm was growing. They went out again after luncheon. At about two o'clock rain began to fall, and, though it did not last long, the party began to come back to the cars to return to the inn. Spencer alone did not return. They waited some time for him, they searched for him; there was no trace of him. We have not seen anything of him since.

"Of course, we threw a cordon around the entire area within an hour. Inspector Jamison of Scotland Yard has been in charge and is on the spot. We are reasonably certain that Spencer was not taken out of the region by any road or railway. What happened from the time he disappeared until Scotland Yard arrived on the scene, we cannot say; but that time was not more than two hours at maximum, and it might well have been considerably less, for we have some evidence to show that Spencer had fished his way for approximately half a mile upstream from the place at which they had lunched; he could hardly have done so in less than half an hour.



His footprints, or what we assume to be his footprints, lead up to a small rise in the river bank; they do not take up beyond it."

"There was no evidence of a struggle?" asked Pons.

"None, Mr. Pons. The scene was studied with the minutest care, and it seems patent that the abduction was carried out with consummate skill. Inspector Jamison has confessed that he is baffled."

Pons smiled wintrily. "Ah, that is not a condition which could be described as exactly foreign to Inspector Jamison."

"I must impress upon you the need for the swift recovery of the memoranda," said the Foreign Secretary.

Pons sat for some time without replying, his head sunk on his chest, his eyes fixed upon the hearth-rug. His elbows rested on the arms of his chair, and his fingertips touched in a Gothic arch before him.

"And the other delegates?" he asked presently.

"They have naturally returned to London," replied Lord Kilvert. "We have been delaying talks since then, because, until we know where Spencer and the memoranda he carried are, we are at a disadvantage. The Prime Minister, who has been informed of developments, is pressing us for a rapid recovery of our position."

"And the ratio? The memoranda? How were they set down? Were they documented or ciphered?"

"We do not know, Mr. Pons. The ratio and memoranda were left entirely to Spencer's discretion. The ratio need not have been set down at all; it was short enough to be remembered. But there were certain possible variations approaching the basic ratio which made it necessary to have at least some of these figures written down. We believe, therefore, that Spencer carried somewhere on his person such memoranda as were vital to the discussions."

"At whose suggestion was the expedition on the Test undertaken?"

"Why, I believe it was young Spencer's suggestion. He is an expert angler, and has also achieved some small fame as an amateur fly-tier of no mean abilities."

"How much time does His Majesty's Government give us?" asked Pons.

"Twenty-four hours. We cannot possibly delay any longer. We can put a car at your disposal immediately."

"On the contrary, it would be more desirable that Dr. Parker and I appear on the scene as disinterested disciples of Walton. There is

a train leaving Waterloo Station within the hour. We shall be on it."

I doubt that anyone would have taken us for other than what Pons intended us to represent at Chilbolton, a duo of amateur anglers. Though he had observed rather pointedly that I needed little alteration save in appropriate costume, Pons himself had undergone a considerable transformation. He looked the epitome of a countryman out for a day of piscatorial sport; he had altered his face with the addition of spectacles and side-whiskers, together with a small goatee, and, like myself, he was attired in typical angling clothes, save for his deerstalker cap, which was not inappropriate.

The Foreign Secretary had supplied Pons with a carefully drawn map of the region between Chilbolton and Leckford, painstakingly detailing the area in which Spencer had vanished, so that we had a very clear picture of the scene in mind. Pons had suggested that Lord Kilvert say nothing to Inspector Jamison save that Pons had been consulted and would arrive on the scene in good time and manage to reach the inspector when he needed his assistance. With this, Lord Kilvert had to be content, though he had given the impression on taking his leave of Pons that he thought him an eccentric indeed.

For most of the way to Chilbolton, Pons sat studying the map, making muttered comments from time to time.

"From Testcombe Bridge, below Chilbolton, the railway follows the Test for some distance," he said at last. "Beyond that, on the farther side, lies the road, which is not yet tarred, so that any hurried activity on the road would have thrown up a cloud of dust; it had not rained long, according to Lord Kilvert's account. Both railway-line and road thus follow the river at no great distance, but it is to be noted that the Test divides not far from the bridge, and it is then soon joined by the Anton. There are level marshes and reed-beds beyond, leading to the wooded hills of Longstock Park, and the high chalk-downs of Salisbury look upon the scene beyond Stockbridge. The party was not fishing the main stream of the Test, but the secondary stream which runs through Leckford before again joining the main water above Stockbridge. That is a region of poplar groves and, beyond the marshes in the vicinity of Leckford, there is ample cover for any venturesome rascal. Yet it would seem a daring foreign agent, indeed, who could hope to abduct in broad

daylight a member of a party as large as this one, would you not think, Parker?"

"I would," I admitted.

"Yet Spencer was either taken by someone, or he went of his own free will. He might have crossed to the road and stopped a passing car; he might even have caught a train slowing down for the Leckford stop."

"He might, save that he had no motive to do so."

"At least, he had no known motive."

I looked sharply at him, but there was no hint in the head sunk on his chest and the half-closed eyes of the direction of his thoughts. "You think he may have had some such motive?" I asked finally.

"I am only considering all the possibilities. His Lordship apparently considered but one, which appeared to him as the most likely. It has too often been my experience that the most likely solution is not always the most probable, and that the most improbable solution very often emerges as the only tenable one. You know my methods, Parker."

He said nothing further until we reached Chilbolton, and then roused himself from his reverie only long enough to say that, since a study of the map indicated that the scene of the disappearance was closer to Leckford than to Chilbolton, we would travel on to that village. Then he lapsed once more into brooding silence.

The day was mild and sunny, though occasional clouds scudded across the heavens. The countryside around Leckford was indeed a lovely land. Low, wooded hills framed the valley of the Test at that place, and the face of the earth itself was a rich green, that deep summer green of mature verdure. I soon had even better opportunity to view it than I had from the windows of our compartment, for once we had left the train, Pons set out for the Test from Leckford on foot, swinging along in his long-limbed stride to the side of the old canal which carried the branch of the Test through Leckford, and followed the bank of this out of the village in the direction of Chilbolton.

We were soon out of the village and in a stretch of shaded water, where poplars rose up tall and straight, and willows and alders and osiers bent above the stream. Pons lost no time in beginning to fish, casting his fly with zest and with a skill I had hardly expected of him. Moreover, on his third cast, he hooked a sizable trout which he played with singular ability and presently dropped into his creel.

We made our way slowly but steadily upstream, until we came within sight of the scene of Spencer's disappearance. It was Pons

who first saw the rise from the low, almost boggy river's edge to a higher, more solid bank.

"If I am not mistaken, that is the site we are looking for, Parker. If I had any doubt, the presence of that fellow leaning against a tree just beyond it would have laid it; that is certainly our estimable friend, Jamison."

"Will you make yourself known to him?"

"Let us just proceed as we are. If he should be under surveillance himself, it would never occur to him to think so."

Accordingly, we went forward, Pons casting now and then, though by this time he had already taken three trout to my pair, and the foliage pressing upon the Test at this point made casting more difficult. He took care to scrutinize the shore as we went, noting footprints at the very water's edge. These might well have been the missing Spencer's for here and there the prints of others, doubtless of those searching for trace of the vanished man, were plainly in evidence, and this one line of footprints had for the most part been carefully preserved. They were lost, however, at the rising ground.

As we mounted the rise, the portly form of Inspector Jamison rose up before us, his thick moustache bristling, his sharp eyes suspicious.

"Here, here, what's all this?" he demanded truculently. "What are you doing here?"

"Ha!" snorted Pons in a disguised voice. "Here is an oaf who does not recognize an angler when he sees one. One might better ask what *he* is doing here. Why, the fellow looks like an imitation policeman."

Jamison flushed angrily. "Be off with you. The police are in charge."

"Fiddlesticks," Pons answered. "We have permission to fish these waters. Where is yours?"

"We'll see about that," said Jamison ominously. He turned and raised his voice to call, "Cort! Here, please."

Pons turned to me in mock surprise, his eyes glinting with amusement. "The oaf means what he says."

By this time, however, Jamison had had a good look at me. "Never mind, Cort," he called out, looking indignantly at Pons. "You must have your sport, eh?"

"A man ought to combine pleasure with business whenever it is possible to do so," answered Pons. "Nothing has changed?"

"Nothing."

"Very well, then. Let us not be seen talking together."

"My men are all around the place. No one could observe us."

"Indeed! I recall at least one occasion when a similar confidence almost led to tragedy."

Pons led the way among the trees and bushes along the risen ground at right angles from the Test, in the direction of the railway-line and the road beyond it. There were no footprints to be followed, yet Pons scrutinized the ground with greater care than he had thus far looked at any portion of the area, and he had not gone far before he bent to pick up something. He held it in the palm of his hand, and I peered at it. It was a dry-fly.

"A Royal Coachman," I said. "Dropped by some angler."

"I should hardly have thought it the badge of a police-inspector," said Pons dryly.

We moved on, and presently Pons picked up a second dry-fly, again a Royal Coachman.

"A careless angler," I said.

Then he found another, and yet two more, making a total of five, scattered throughout the grove of trees that held to the rise.

"Most careless, indeed," he commented.

He pocketed all five of the Royal Coachmen, his face thoughtful, but did not hesitate in his steady pace, walking onward until we climbed a small fence and mounted the embankment to the permanent way of the London & South Western Railway. There he stood for a few moments, looking beyond the rails to the road, over which lay a mist of dust shot through with sunlight.

Perhaps a mile or more down the road lay Leckford, its roofs and gables just in sight. A little way in the other direction stood a tinker's van, and beyond it, screened by a grove of trees, a small secluded house. This seemed to catch Pons's eye; his gaze lingered thoughtfully on it for some time, as if he were anxious to scrutinize it with great care, marking its inaccessibility, though its inhabitants evidently had ready access to both railway and road. Then, without comment, Pons crossed the railway-embankment to the road, and began to walk away from Leckford. He drew up at the tinker's van; a hunchbacked old man sat cobbling shoes beside the van, and just beyond it a lone horse was tethered.

"Good-afternoon," Pons greeted him. "Can you tell me who lives in that house over there?" He pointed with his rod.

"No, sir. That I can't. I'm a stranger here."

The tinker had chosen his stand well. He and his van were shaded by the trees of the little grove along the road where the van stood; beyond, on both sides, was treeless country on which the sun doubtless shone remorselessly on hot days. He had been well guided, too, in his decision to keep sufficiently far from Leckford to avoid being taxed or troubled by the local policeman of that village; yet he was not so far away as to enable him to obtain work from Leckford.

"You've been here for a while, though. Long enough to say whether you've noticed anything unusual going on over there."

"No, sir, I didn't notice. I mind nobody's business but my own."

At this point, the door of the van opened, and a pretty, dark-haired girl of perhaps twenty appeared in the doorway. She looked anxiously out at the old man, with but a fleeting glance at us.

"Don't tire yourself now, father," she admonished.

"Don't worry yourself," answered the old man.

Pons thanked him and withdrew, walking on up the road quite rapidly until he reached the vicinity of the secluded house, where he slowed his pace to a more casual saunter and took the opportunity to inspect the house and its tree-girt grounds as carefully as possible without being too obvious in his purpose. Then, inexplicably, he left the road with a murmured admonition to me, recrossed the railway, and plunged once more into the low country toward the brown water of the Test.

"What now?" I could not forebear asking.

"We came to fish," he answered. "Let us pursue the sport as long as we are here."

"And Spencer and his memoranda?" I asked. "What of them?"

He ignored my question and countered with one of his own. "The five Royal Coachmen told you nothing, Parker?"

"Nothing except that the fellow who was so careless could scarcely be called a true disciple of Walton."

"I submit that they were not dropped by accident."

"Indeed! And if not, for what purpose were they dropped? Certainly they marked no trail, other than to point the obvious direction Spencer must have gone."

"Now I thought that extremely significant," replied Pons. He had reached the bank of the Test now, and began gravely to cast. "I thought it so significant that it occurred to me these dry-flies offered nothing less than a complete solution to the puzzle of Spencer's disappearance."

I stared at him, I fear, agape. "Oh, come, Pons—you are reading too much into them," I protested.

"It surprises me to hear you say so. You have yourself begun to read them correctly. If the Royal Coachmen were not dropped to serve as a guide—and I daresay they were not dropped for that purpose—then they were certainly dropped for a reason which must have seemed to Spencer a sound one."

"Aren't you taking too much for granted in assuming that Spencer dropped them?" I asked.

"I fancy not. In the first place, they present themselves along the only way Spencer could have gone with the least opportunity for observation. Had he gone up, down, or across the water, he would surely have been observed by one or more members of his party. He had no alternative but to utilize the cover of the trees and retreat toward the railway and road; so much must have been evident not only to him, but to anyone who might seek to abduct him. I submit that he dropped the five Royal Coachmen intentionally. It follows then that he was not carried off by main force, for if he had been, he would have been unable to drop the flies; and if part of his paraphernalia were to be lost while he was being dragged away, it is beyond the bounds of coincidence that that part should be only five flies, each exactly the same as the others. No, I submit that he was not carried off by main force, as the Foreign Secretary seems to believe, but went voluntarily. I submit, further, that that is the only tenable solution, since it is hardly conceivable that he could have been forcibly abducted in broad daylight without someone at least having seen him. Remember that the tinker's van stands directly in the line of his passage, that the house beyond also commands the way he would of necessity have come from the bank of the stream."

"But if he went voluntarily," I objected, "would he not have been guilty of a breach of duty?"

"How? His duty lay in silence about the basic ratio and the accompanying memoranda. We have no reason to believe that he divulged these data."

"Then why has he not communicated with his superiors?"

"Because he is either dead or being prevented from doing so; I am inclined to believe the latter."

I was baffled and confessed my perplexity.

"My dear Parker, it is most elementary," said Pons. "I have seldom come upon such a satisfying example of the pristine effectiveness of the science of deduction as these five Royal Coachmen."

One might almost say they are unique, for any variable amount of deductions might be made from them, but all must eventually reduce to a series of inevitable facts. Let us just pause for a moment and examine one of the dry-flies whose presence at the scene conveys so much information to the meticulous observer."

He laid aside his rod and I did likewise. He sat down on a fallen tree-bole, and took one of the Royal Coachmen from his pocket.

"Now these are excellently made—but they are not a commercial product, as an old hand at the rod must observe at once. Spencer is a fly-tying enthusiast; you will recall Lord Kilvert's saying so. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that this is a product of his own hand, as doubtless are the quartet remaining in my pocket. But does it not seem to you a little more full than most?"

"There is some permissible variation."

He paused and looked under the cover of his creel, where he carried some dry-flies of his own. "Ah, here we are. Let us compare this commercial Royal Coachman of my own with this discovery."

He held the two up together.

"Well, Spencer's has a thicker body."

"Capital, Parker. In almost every other respect they seem similar. There is no variation in the wing, none in the hurl, none in hook or hackle. The quality of the red silk thread about the body appears to be the same; while Spencer has spared the shellac, certainly the thread is of the same size."

"But Spencer has used more of it. He has wound the body more thickly," I put in.

"Let us just have a closer look at it."

So saying, he drew the hurl down the hook, caught hold of the red silk thread, snapped it, and began patiently to unwind it, his eyes agleam with anticipation. What he expected to find, I had no way of knowing. What he found was a tiny slip of paper, not more than an eighth of an inch wide, and scarcely an inch long, wound carefully around the hook beneath the thread which made up the body of the dry-fly.

"I daresay this is what we want," said Pons, with satisfaction.

He unrolled the slip of paper and laid it face upward in his palm so that I could see, written in ink upon it, a series of numerals. I read them—"5-5-3, 4-4-3, 3-3-2."

"A cipher?" I ventured.

Pons shook his head impatiently. "No, no. These figures are surely understandable enough. England's five ships to America's



five to Japan's three, and so on. The Japanese are quite right in suspecting that naval status inferior to that of the other maritime nations is planned at the Naval Conference. This is surely nothing else but a memorandum pertinent to the basic naval ratio. There is hardly any need to take apart the others; they will contain similar information. The question which now remains is this: did Spencer have these memoranda committed to memory, together with the basic ratio, or were these jottings his sole recourse? Let us presume for the moment that they were his sole source of information, and we find ready to hand the explanation of why he dropped them. He did so not to point a way for possible pursuit, but simply to rid himself of this information because he suspected that something was amiss, and knew that if a fellow-angler found these flies and used them, the water would soon eradicate what ink there was on the papers."

"But if he went voluntarily, I fail to follow your reasoning, Pons."

"Because you are making it a question of either-or," replied Pons. "He might have gone without duress and yet have grave doubts of his wisdom in so doing. In short, he may have been enticed away. He is a young man; he is doubtless a romantic idealist—it would take something of that to put a man into Foreign Affairs in our time, I daresay. Very well, then. Let us reconstruct the event.

"Young Rigby Spencer is fishing, with his precious cargo so adroitly concealed on his person—hooked into his hatband or his belt or a pocket or even his creel. He is fishing off the rise when he is accosted by someone in need of help—a motorist, perhaps a young woman, whose car has come to grief along the road. Someone may have been waiting for days to find him alone at an auspicious place and time. He cannot resist the appeal to his gallantry; but, having assented and begun to follow, he has qualms and, perhaps as surreptitiously as possible, he drops the telltale Royal Coachmen. If they were seen, no significance was likely to be attached to them; he might have reasoned that it would be so, though his place of concealment was doubtless originally planned to protect his information from foreign members of his party. By the time he realized that his suspicions were well-founded, it was too late for him to turn back."

"Even a romantic idealist ought to be able to recognize a foreign agent," I protested.

"Excellent, Parker!" cried Pons. "You have hit upon my own demurrer. Let us ask ourselves whether Spencer's secret might not

be as valuable to a traitorous Englishman who could offer it for sale, as to a foreign agent? I submit that the entire operation against Spencer is a little too daring and at the same time a little too crude to tempt a foreign agent. No, what seemed obvious to me from the outset was that there had been a leak from the Foreign Office itself, and someone had acted upon it. Spencer had not yet tipped his hand in conference; there was no other avenue but secret information from the source to know him the bearer of the memoranda, any more than there is now reason to suppose that there is any other tenable explanation of the five Royal Coachmen."

I admitted that Pons's deductions were cogent. "But then, where is Rigby Spencer? Are we too late to save him?"

"I rather think not. If he has admitted nothing, he may still be alive, kept so in the hope of wringing these data from him, though with each day that passes, it may be assumed that his worth diminishes. Let us set Inspector Jamison on the track."

He took up his rod and walked rapidly back along the bank of the Test.

We came upon Jamison where we had left him. At the moment he was engaged in giving directions to two young constables, but, catching sight of us, he left off what he was saying and grinned in superior fashion.

"Still empty-handed, I see. I hardly thought you'd turn him up. We entered and searched every dwelling, cordons were thrown about roads miles away, the train that passed that afternoon was thoroughly examined. We left no stone unturned, even to harassing that tinker and turning his van back there upside down."

"Spencer could hardly have slipped through your fingers, could he?" said Pons.

"I doubt it."

"Then, of course, he is still here. Perhaps you had better take him before some harm is done to him, other than that which may already have befallen him. It can hardly be comfortable to be gagged and bound."

Jamison's jaw dropped. "You know where he is, Pons?" he cried.

"You will find him in that tinker's van; it will have either a false top or a false bottom. But watch your step. That old fellow is dangerous and the girl no less so."

Jamison wavered only a moment; then he and his constables set off at a rapid trot along the rise toward the roadside where the tinker's van stood.

Pons regarded me quizzically. "You are surprised, Parker?"

"Nothing you say or do any longer surprises me," I answered. "But just the same, if I may ask. . . ."

"It was all plainly in evidence," he replied. "The tinker's van had been in place not more than a week, possibly less, as you could have seen by the condition of the grass beneath it. Rain had not fallen there; it had fallen around the van. Hence it was present yesterday. But the place where the horse was tethered indicated that animal's presence for several days, or approximately just before the coming of the angling expedition, brought there by the same source from the Foreign Office which had information about Spencer. The tinker's van was so obvious that Jamison, eager to follow the Foreign Office's directive in regard to foreign agents, hardly considered a vehicle so indigenous to the scene. And the young lady who came to the door? Was she not pretty? Young, charming? And would not her appeal for help because her old, crippled father had fallen and injured himself have moved any British gentleman, even you, Parker? Come, admit it, you have always had a soft spot for the ladies, Parker!"

I smiled ruefully.

"Besides, the entire theory was of a piece; if any part of it were wrong, then the whole could manifestly be in error. But the Royal Coachmen divulged their secret, proving that Spencer was enticed away. And in the van we found an agent who could scarcely be improved upon for her ability to be enticing to a young man like Rigby Spencer.

"As for Spencer's ingenious flies, we shall post them to Lord Kilvert and ease his mind."

Young Rigby Spencer called at 7B three days later, his alert blue eyes twinkling, his good-natured face still somewhat abashed by the ease with which he had been taken. About his head he still bore signs of maltreatment.

"I came to thank you, Mr. Pons. Though the papers tell us it was all Inspector Jamison's work, I have other facts from my superiors," he said. "We have stopped up the leak in our office, and Lord Kilvert has destroyed my Royal Coachmen."

"A clever hiding-place," said Pons. "But no angler could ever lose five Royal Coachmen one after another."

"And only someone appreciative of the niceties of that royal pastime would have come to that conclusion," answered Spencer

immediately. "The young lady is an accomplished actress, Mr. Pons. The two of them gave me a rough time of it, though I think the worst of it was being so well trussed up as to be helpless in that false roof when the men from the Yard searched the van."

"I daresay. But in the interests of that monarch whom we both acknowledge as our sovereign, Mr. Spencer, I suggest that in matters of state, gallantry must come second," said Pons.

Watching him go off down Praed Street, Pons added, "That young man bids fair to become a valuable and trusted public servant, Parker. He has learned a lesson no amount of instruction could have conveyed to him."

"So have I," I answered. "I would never have dreamed that so much could be done with a common Royal Coachman!"

## *The Adventure of the Frightened Baronet*

FROM THE CHESS problem in which he had been absorbed, Solar Pons slowly raised his head, cocked a little, and smiled. His fingers relinquished their hold upon the knight; he leaned back.

"Yes, yes, as I thought," he murmured, "we are about to have company."

London was lost in fog, a heavy autumnal curtain shutting the city away from our lodgings in Praed Street, and at first there was only the distant hum of diminished traffic that was the pulse of the city, and the several small noises of water dropping; then I heard the curiously muffled sound of hoofbeats, traveling a short distance, stopping, then coming forward again.

"Surely he is looking for Number 7," observed Pons with satisfaction, for time had been pressing heavily on his hands since the bizarre adventure of the Octagon House. "To whom else would he address himself at this hour of the night? Nor is it amiss to surmise that he has come up from the country not far from London; horse-drawn carriages are uncommon indeed within the city. Clearly now," he went on, listening intently, "he has got down just a few doors away; he has gone up to the door, flashed his light on the number. No, that is not number seven; yet, number seven cannot be far away. Hear him! He returns to his carriage—but he does not get in; no, he is too close to the desired address for that—he leads his horse down the street a few doors, and here he is."

I looked toward the night-bell, back to Pons's expectant features, marking his keen eyes, his aquiline nose, his firm, thin-lipped mouth, touched still by his smile, and once more at the bell. On the instant it jangled. Pons stepped to the speaking tube and invited our visitor to come up, and in a few moments there was a tap on the door giving to our lodgings. I strode across the room and opened it.

Across the threshold stepped a short, stout, sturdily built gentleman of approximately sixty years of age, swarthy of skin, heavily bearded, and still dark-haired; he fixed his small glittering eyes on Pons, bowed curtly, and handed him an envelope. It was unsealed.

I crowded up to Pons and looked over his shoulder at the card he took from the envelope. *Alexander Taber Rowan, K.C.B. Chiltern Manor*. Pons turned the card over. In a shaky script someone had scrawled thereon: "*For God's sake, come! I can't stand it much longer.*" I flashed a glance of inquiry at Pons, and saw that his eyes had lit up with the excitement of the chase.

"Late of His Majesty's Service, attached to the staff of the Viceroy of India," said Pons, returning the card to the envelope and dropping both to the table. He looked across the lamplight to where Sir Alexander's man stood, fingering his cap.

"I am Kennerly, sir."

"What is it?" asked Pons.

"It's the curse of the stone, Mr. Pons."

His voice was gruff but not discourteous. What he said apparently conveyed something to Pons, though it meant nothing to me, and I saw that at the moment at least Pons had no intention of enlightening me. He nodded.

"You were sent to bring us?"

"If possible."

"Good. We'll be with you in a few moments."

While Pons got into his raincoat, I saw him scrutinizing Kennerly with marked interest.

"A veteran of India yourself, I see," he said presently.

"Yes, sir."

"Of great personal service to the Maharajah of Indore."

"I saved his life, sir."

"Very likely in the encounter in which you lost your foot."

"Yes, sir."

By this time Pons was ready; he turned to me, his eyes twinkling at the sight of my obvious efforts to observe the bases for his deductions and seeing only the telltale smoothness of the shoe which betrayed the lack of a foot. "Coming, Parker?"

We descended the stairs after leaving a message for Mrs. Johnson, our landlady, and passed into the thick fog which lent to Pons and Kennerly a shadowy, almost intangible being. The carriage loomed abruptly out of the night. We entered it. Kennerly mounted before us; and soon we were traveling northwest through London in the direction of the St. John's Wood. Our pace was necessarily slow, but the horse seemed to proceed with an uncanny instinct and, as far as I could determine, no errors in direction were made. I must have dozed for a time because when I awoke we had cleared the suburbs.

Pons sat deep in thought, his visored cap low over his face, and I hesitated to disturb him; yet I rankled within at my own inability to follow his deductions, and finally I could contain myself no longer.

"Doubtless it is a most elementary matter, but how in the devil did you know that this fellow is a veteran of India?"

"Come, come, Parker—it should be obvious. For one thing, his military bearing; for another, he is the trusted servant of the baronet. What more likely than that he was his orderly in service? But, primarily, he wears a ring he could have got only in India."

"I can follow the observation about the lost foot easily enough, but what about his service to the Maharajah of Indore?"

"The ring he wears bears the crest of the Maharajah. Such rings are not for sale. It follows therefore that he must have been given it by the Maharajah himself. Since such a ring is not given simply as a gift, for it is too personal, but rather as a mark of esteem, it is not at all a shot in the dark to assume that our visitor did the Maharajah a personal service of such vital importance that nothing short of the crested ring would satisfy the Maharajah's sense of gratitude."

"And the card?" I asked, determined that nothing should escape me. "What did you make of that?"

"Only that our client is badly frightened, that his sending for me is done with the knowledge of no one else in the household save this man, that the matter is one in which he hesitates to seek police protection, very probably because of the attendant publicity, and that he has been drinking to keep up his nerve. From what his man has said, I take it that something has come up to remind him that the Eye of Siva which he acquired some thirty years ago during a campaign in the hill country of India was, after all, cursed, and that the fruits of this curse are now being visited upon him."

I took a deep breath and considered. "The script and what he writes betray some fright," I ventured.

"Capital! Though obvious."

"But the other matters—?"

"He comes to us in preference to the police, and he comes at an hour which indicates secrecy; since he himself has nothing to fear from us, clearly he believes his family will disapprove of his sending for us. He therefore summons us at a time when he can present us to his household in fact, as a *fait accompli*. It is, further, not ill-advised to assume that there are troubled waters there. Finally, there was the distinct odour of rum about his card."

It was in the early hours of the morning that we arrived at Chiltern Manor in the low rolling country immediately adjacent to the hills which give the house its name. We had ridden out of the fog not far from the environs of London, and a waning moon shone down, shedding its pale light upon the wooded country and fields through which we now rode. The estate lay behind a high old stone wall, almost totally concealed by a heavy growth of vines, and surrounded by many trees and bushes. Rowan's man drove through a gate in the side-wall and directly around to the carriage entrance, where he left horse and carriage standing to lead us into the house, which rose up from among trees, an old stone building not without Victorian magnificence, at this early morning hour dark and sombre save for a faint glimmer of yellow light from a window on the second floor.

I could not help observing that we entered the house by a side entrance, and that Kennerly's movements were marked by a singular care, thus confirming Pons's surmise that Rowan had sent for us in secret; moreover, the entrance gave almost at once upon a narrow staircase, which clearly led up between the wall and a room below, almost a part of the wall as it were, for we were forced to proceed in single file by the small light of a pocket-torch which Kennerly used to illumine the stairs.

Pons's client waited in his own rooms. The pale light shed by the single lamp burning there presently disclosed him, an elderly man, deep in an upholstered chair, and wrapped in a steamer rug, as if for warmth. His chin rested upon his chest, and his sunken eyes looked at us from over his pince-nez. A thin moustache and beard, both white, in singular contrast to Kennerly's black growth, and a fringe of white hair seen from under the black skullcap he wore, ornamented his thin, ascetic face, white within the darkness of his immediate environment.

"Ah, Mr. Pons!" he said in a cultured, well-modulated voice. "I had hoped Kennerly could bring you." He glanced interrogatively at me, and Pons introduced me as his colleague. "I am afraid my message may have seemed somewhat incoherent to you."

"Not at all," responded Pons. "In fact, it is perfectly clear that something has happened to make you believe there may after all be something more than legend to the curse on the Eye of Siva."

A wan smile touched the baronet's lips. "I am reassured. I made no mistake in sending for you."



"Let us hope that we may be able to justify your confidence," said Pons quietly. "However, if I remember rightly, the stone is now in the British Museum."

"It has been there for twenty-five years." He shrugged. "But apparently this has made no difference. I will not attempt to deny that I am badly frightened, Mr. Pons. Approximately two months ago the first of these mysterious events took place. I thought initially that I was the subject of a practical joke in the worst possible taste. The occasion was the Naval Conference; since Chiltern Manor is not too far from London, friends of mine in the diplomatic service in Britain for the Conference called on me. At the end of one of those days, I found a card in the tray. It read, *Puranas Mahadeva*. I regret that at the moment the significance of this did not occur to me; I assumed that it had been left by some minor official whom I had met at Delhi and forgotten.

"That night, Mr. Pons," he went on after a short pause, his eyes glittering strangely now, and his breath coming a little faster, testifying to his excitement at the memory of the incident he was about to relate, "that night, as I was preparing to retire, I was summoned from my study by a tap on my door and I stepped into the hall. No one was there. Now, sir, since I am as familiar with this house by night as by day, I did not turn on the light. I stepped out into the hallway, and had begun to walk down toward the stairs when my attention was attracted to what appeared to be a spot of illumination low on the floor along the wall; at second glance, I saw that it was moving steadily before me. And then, sir, I observed that it was not a light at all—but a kind of spectral image. Mr. Pons, *it was the image of Siva, the Destroyer!* Perfect in every detail, a miniature spectre! I was startled. I was not immediately disturbed; I felt I had experienced an illusion of some kind, and quickly turned on the lights. There was nothing in sight, nothing whatever. I examined the wall, the floor—nothing. I returned to my rooms somewhat shaken, thinking naturally of that old curse; an article not long before in the feature section of an American newspaper had brought all those old painful memories back; and it was then that it struck me with the force of a thunderclap what those words on the calling card stood for: *Puranas* is the title of Hindu scriptures; and *Mahadeva* is a less-widely known name for Siva! I took out the card at once—or perhaps I had better say, sir, that I took out the one I thought was the card I wanted. Mr. Pons—there was nothing whatever on it; it was perfectly blank; there was nothing to show that a single letter of printing had ever been on it!"

"Ah," murmured Pons delightedly.

"That was the beginning of a series of events which I am unable to explain save as the malign evidence of the workings of that ancient curse! The pattern has been repeated endlessly; the tap on the door, the strange apparition—nor has this been all; I have seen the spectre with increasing frequency on the top of the estate wall on the north and in other places where I would not have expected to come upon it. Moreover, within the past few nights, events have taken a more serious turn; I have awakened to the sound of voices warning me to prepare for death; I have also heard the strange whistles the Sepoys used to give; I am ashamed to confess that I have had recourse to rum to steady my nerves. It is the firm conviction of the family that I am losing my mind, for no one else has seen any of these apparitions, and they have held out against me in summoning help from outside, no doubt for fear of any publicity which might attend having you here. But last night the mastiff which guards the north gate vanished without a sound; I have no speculation as to what may have happened to him. And now I am convinced that at last the curse on the stone has become active again."

"Why?"

"You know the story of the stone, Mr. Pons. How the priests in that temple opposed the Maharajah—indeed, they made their temple a base of operations. We destroyed the temple, and the Eye of Siva was a prize of war; it is true that in the *mêlée* attendant upon the destruction of the temple, one of the guardian priests was slain. The newspapers will have it that it was this man who put a curse upon the stone, but the fact is that the only curse connected with it was a general and ancient curse upon anyone who desecrated the temple; it is really not attached to the stone at all. However, as you know, the Maharajah died shortly thereafter, three of the soldiers accompanying me into the temple died within a year, and four months ago—the *raison d'être* for that American newspaper article—Sir James McLeen, who commanded my right wing in that engagement, fell to his death under mysterious circumstances. These events, looked upon in the light of that ancient curse, naturally point to but one conclusion—to which I did not come until after I had begun to witness these manifestations; only then did the other events fall into their place in the pattern."

"You suggest that the design is to retrieve the Eye of Siva?"

"Not alone that, but to punish those responsible for the destruction of that temple." He touched his lips with his tongue, nervously.

"But I feel that you do not put much credence in the curse, Mr. Pons."

Pons smiled dryly. "Let us say rather that I am at the moment concerned only with the problem of which aspect of the matter is cause, and which is effect. I take it you own more than one dog."

"Yes, of course."

"You have said you have witnessed the apparition of Siva on the estate wall. Was its appearance accompanied by any demonstration from the dogs?"

"None."

"Does this suggest nothing to you?"

"Only that whatever is out there is meant for me alone. The Hindus have many very strange beliefs, Mr. Pons, and stranger things than this have happened in India, without any explanation."

"I have some acquaintance with the lore and legends of India," replied Pons absently. "Have you ever seen the spectre of Siva in someone else's company?"

"Yes, on one occasion my brother Ransom was with me. On another, my daughter's fiancé, Geoffrey Saring. Neither of them was able to see anything. Yet the thing was as plain to me as you are, sitting there."

"Your man Kennerly has never seen it?"

"No."

Pons sat for a few moments with his eyes closed, touching the lobe of his left ear thoughtfully with his thumb and forefinger. Presently he gazed at the apprehensive baronet once more. "I wish you would instruct Kennerly to answer any questions I put to him."

"It shall be done."

"Further, I would like to have you show me approximately the space in the hallway covered by the apparition at such times as you have seen it."

Without a word the old man got up. Pulling his steamer rug around him, he walked a little unsteadily over to the door, threw it open, and stepped hesitantly into the hall. He turned up the light and pointed to the skirting-board along the farther wall.

"Beginning there, Mr. Pons—and going for a distance of twenty to thirty feet—I cannot be sure which, but in any case it varies."

"At which end?"

"It is usually at this end."

"Who occupies this floor besides yourself?"

"My daughter's rooms are across the hall. Down the hall—

Geoffrey Saring, next to him my brother Ransom, then my sister Megan's room; and then across, a guest room of some dimensions; Kennerly has got it ready for you and Dr. Parker."

Pons stood in the hall, hands clasped behind him, gazing thoughtfully along the wall where it joined the floor, which, for a distance of approximately a foot from the wall, was not covered by carpet. He stood thus for perhaps three or four minutes; then he turned abruptly, as if dismissing the hall, and said that except for one thing, there was nothing further he could do tonight. "And that one?" inquired the baronet.

"I want to have a talk with Kennerly, if you will send him to our room."

"Certainly." The baronet hesitated briefly; then a look of great anxiety crept into his eyes; he put one trembling hand on Pons's shoulder, and said, "I hope you will be able to explain this strange mystery, sir. I am close to the edge."

"We shall see," said Pons imperturbably.

We entered our room and found everything laid out for us with the skill and comprehension possessed only by someone who had served in the capacity of an orderly for many years. Pons threw himself into a chair without pausing to remove anything but his raincoat and his cap; he looked quizzically over at me, but his mouth was grim.

"This is devil's work, Parker."

"You attach no importance to the curse, then?"

"I attach every importance to it, on the contrary; it is the most important single factor in the matter."

"Indeed! You did not let Sir Alexander think so."

"There is time for that, Parker."

I was about to say more when Pons cautioned me to be silent, rising from his chair and moving with cat-like quiet toward the door.

"Kennerly," I whispered.

"Kennerly's slight limp is distinctive in his walk," replied Pons in an equally low voice. "It is not Kennerly."

There was a quick, rustling tap on our door. Pons threw it open.

A young woman stood there, her ash-blonde hair wild, one hand almost protectively in the pocket of her dressing-saque, the other holding it close about her neck. Her dark eyes darted from one to the other of us before she stepped into the room, closed the door, and stood with her back against it, her mouth working a little, a frown heavy on her brow.

"It is Mr. Solar Pons, isn't it?" she said, looking at Pons.

"At your service," replied Pons.

"I have seen your picture in the papers often enough," she said bitterly. "Oh, Mr. Pons—surely you are not going to make my poor father's madness the subject of scandal? I beg you to go away, to say nothing. . . ."

"I am not in the habit of announcing myself to the press, Miss Rowan."

"I'm sorry. But it is a painful thing to witness the decay of a man like my father—quite apart from his being, after all, my father."

"You are convinced his mind is going?"

"I wish I were not. But there is no other explanation. He has seen things neither Uncle Ransom nor Geoffrey saw when he was with them; it isn't the mere hallucinations alone, but the added fact that they prey upon his mind and fill him with fear. He has for some years suffered from a heart weakened by coronary trouble, and now that his mind has given way, the end is only a matter of time."

"Perhaps I may be able to relieve him," said Pons.

"If only you could!" she said earnestly. "But I'm afraid it is too late. I feel only that your being here will give him a false hope which, when it is destroyed, will affect him all the more adversely."

"I understand that he suggested calling in outside help and that the members of his household opposed this."

"Yes, I did. So did my brother, who was visiting us at that time. So did my aunt. Only Geoffrey and Uncle Ransom seemed to think it a good idea, and I could see that my uncle was none too keen, for all that."

"Well, then, I promise you I shall not be here long."

Thus assured, Miss Rowan left us. Pons glanced at me curiously.

"Would you say she was sincere, Parker?"

"Undoubtedly."

"So I thought."

"Perhaps, after all. . . ."

Pons smiled. "Did Sir Alexander strike you as a man who was mentally deranged?"

"Oh, you cannot make such generalizations, Pons. He is certainly under great mental stress. But many madmen are perfectly normal to all but the experienced eye; my eye is hardly experienced to such a degree."

"Let us just ask Kennerly what he thinks," suggested Pons.

The sound of Kennerly's footsteps paused, he knocked on the door, and, in response to Pons's invitation, came in. Like Miss Rowan, he stood with his back against the door until bidden to come forward and sit down.

"I was told to answer some questions, sir," he said in a voice that was courteous without being servile, and toneless without being colourless.

"Why, Dr. Parker has a question to put to you first of all, Kennerly."

Pons turned to me, and thus prodded, I put the question: did Kennerly think that Sir Alexander was losing his mind?

Kennerly favoured me with a hostile, stony stare. "I do not think so," he said coldly.

Pons said nothing to this. "Now, then, Kennerly—to what extent does Ransom Rowan live on his brother's bounty?"

Kennerly was clearly taken aback by the personal nature of Pons's question, but in a moment, reflecting that he had been instructed to answer any questions Pons asked, he rallied. He spoke cautiously. "Sir Alexander does give Mr. Ransom money from time to time."

"How does he spend it?"

Kennerly looked squarely at Pons. "He gambles."

"Ransom is constantly in need, then. What about Miss Rowan?"

"She adores her father sir, and he is very fond of her. But not so fond as to be blinded by her."

"Intimating that he stands in her way occasionally. How?"

"He has not yet given his consent to her marriage."

"She hardly needs his consent, does she?"

"Not necessarily. But Miss Winifred is that kind of girl, she will not do anything against her father's wish."

"He does not trust Mr. Saring?"

"Sir Alexander is a hard man to please."

"And his son?"

"Mr. Philip is wilful and determined to have his own way. Sir Alexander is difficult to get along with in many ways, though I have always managed to do my best for him, and have no reason whatever to complain."

"Philip wishes his own way about what?"

"His inheritance, sir. He has devised some way of obtaining it before his father's death so that he will not have to pay so much duty to the Crown."

"And Sir Alexander's sister?"

"Miss Megan is a very strong-willed woman."

"They do not get along?"

"I think they get along as well as any sister and brother do, sir."

"You have seen none of these phenomena reported by Sir Alexander?" inquired Pons then.

"Nothing whatever. But the dog is missing."

"Yes, the dog is missing. Sir Alexander says he did not make a sound."

"Aye. So he thinks. But he did call once—it wasn't pretty, sir."

"Yes, it is plain that he was lured off by someone whom he had no reason to fear, and killed. He cried out when he was slain. That is what you want to say, is it not, Kennerly?"

"It might be."

"Come, come, Kennerly. We are both working toward the same end. But enough—you may go."

I could not help observing after he had gone, that Kennerly was not only reluctant to speak but singularly uncommunicative.

"Say rather he is very loyal," replied Pons. "He has managed to say enough. Sir Alexander is no martinet, but he is difficult. On the other hand, his brother Ransom is a wastrel, his son Philip is none too honourable, his sister has aspects of the termagant. Sir Alexander is crotchety, distrustful, neurotic: so much is plain. Only for Winifred does Kennerly have the same kind of respect and devotion he has for the old man."

I observed that Kennerly had said nothing whatever about himself.

"There was no need to. I had already seen all that I needed to see about him; and he was well aware of that. Now then," he went on, "let us just step out into the hall for a moment."

"The light-switch is up the hall a way," I said, remembering its place.

"If it were light I wanted, we could well wait until after dawn," said Pons cryptically.

Accordingly, we went out into the darkness of the hall; there we stood for a few moments until our eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Then Pons walked up toward Sir Alexander's rooms, got down on his knees, and began to scrutinize the skirting-board of the wall with great preoccupation.

"What in the world can you hope to see without a light?" I demanded in a whisper.

"I can see very well," replied Pons imperturbably.

I came down on my knees beside him. "What is it?"

Here and there the skirting-board and the floor showed obvious colour changes which, observed at this proximity, were curious and startling, for the effect of these strange streaks and marks was as if a faint illumination were given off into the darkness.

"Elementary, my dear Parker," said Pons, rising and walking slowly down the hall, only to sink to his knees again to crawl from one of the doors to another opening off the hall there.

I was nettled, but it was not until we had returned to our room that I asked Pons what he made of it.

"You know my methods, Parker. The whole problem is as plain as a pikestaff, and it only remains for us to obtain sufficient evidence to convince Sir Alexander. I fancy that our presence will bring matters to a climax rapidly enough."

"You have seen something that has escaped me!" I cried.

Pons chuckled. "Perhaps you have not pursued the facts to their obvious conclusion. Or, even more likely, you have started out on a wrong premise. We shall see in good time. Now let us get a little sleep, for I daresay we have a busy day ahead of us."

Our day began before breakfast, when Pons woke me and suggested that we might walk out upon the gorse and bracken-grown rolling country surrounding the estate of Sir Alexander. Clouds loured in the heavens, but the way was pleasant enough despite the absence of the sun. It was soon clear, however, that Pons was not idling away time. We slipped out of the house and left the estate behind us by way of the north gate, from which point Pons began what initially appeared to be an aimless angling away, but proved ultimately to be only one of a series of concentric circles which he described with the utmost casualness, while he sought diligently for broken ground, so that it soon became obvious to me that he was on the track of the missing dog.

The country away from the north gate was fairly open, apart from the gorse and bracken which covered it, and a kind of heather with which I was unfamiliar in these latitudes, and it was not long before our peregrinations ended at the edge of an abandoned quarry in the foothills.

Gazing down into the dark water which filled a large part of the quarry, Pons said, "I have no doubt that the mastiff lies down there. In the absence of any place which might serve as a burial



ground for the dog, and presuming the need to be rid of him as quickly as possible, this is the likeliest place; we may therefore assume with ample justification that this is the spot to which the dog was lured and slain. In all likelihood, too, the body was weighted, so that it will not rise."

We had hardly taken our leave from this spot when we were suddenly confronted by a burly individual dressed in shooting clothes and carrying a gun; he stepped out from behind a small gnarled tree down the slope (having also partly been hidden by a projecting wall of rock), and appeared before us with a decidedly menacing air, his eyes narrowed, his mouth turned down so that his face had a surly expression. Nevertheless, his resemblance to Sir Alexander was so marked, that his identity was no mystery.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded gruffly.

"That is a question I should be more inclined to put to you than to answer, Mr. Ransom Rowan."

Rowan looked closely at Pons. "Mr. Solar Pons, is it! So Alec sent for you after all!"

"Against your advice?"

Rowan shrugged and stood off to one side. "No difference to me what he does," he said curtly.

He eyed us sullenly and with unmistakable apprehension, but said nothing further to us as we walked past him.

"So that is the gambler," I said when we had passed out of ear-shot. "He looks like a man caught in the middle of his game and uncertain of the way the numbers are coming up."

"Yes, doesn't he?" agreed Pons noncommittally.

At the north gate we had yet another encounter. This time we came upon a young man on his knees beside the gate, who got up, abashed, and stood grinning before us—a husky young fellow of close upon thirty years of age, whose blue eyes regarded us with some chagrin. He introduced himself as Geoffrey Saring.

"Looking for footprints and such," he explained nonchalantly. "Don't believe myself the dog would simply have walked off."

"Surely it is a little too long after the event," observed Pons.

"Well, perhaps. I didn't think of it until now, after Winifred told me you were here."

"If you discover anything, you might just let me know," said Pons dryly. "I understand that you were with Sir Alexander on the occasion of one of his—shall we say, 'visions?'—and saw nothing."

"Yes, Mr. Pons. A rather painful few moments, I must admit. I hope they will not be repeated. It was one evening about a month ago. I had just come downstairs to rejoin Winifred, when I heard him shout; I ran back up immediately. He stood there in the hall pointing to the floor along the wall and demanded of me whether I saw 'it.' There was nothing whatever there. Apparently, whatever it was vanished, for he said, 'There—the infernal thing's gone.' Then he turned to me and asked whether I had seen anyone, or *anything* in the hall or on the stairs; I had not, and said so. He said someone had rapped on his door only a few moments before. That was all there was to it. He seemed gravely upset when I could not see whatever it was he saw."

"Do you remember where Sir Alexander's brother was at that time?"

"I believe he was in his room, but I do not know. He had a similar experience—except that he was in Sir Alexander's room at the time, and Sir Alexander thought he saw something moving along the estate wall. Ransom didn't see anything, either."

Pons's next question was disconcerting. "Have you been long away from the stage, Mr. Saring?"

Saring laughed pleasantly. "Surely it's not that obvious, Mr. Pons?"

"Your clothes are by Du Beune, who caters to the profession. Your hands give no evidence of manual or clerical work. It might be either the stage or the cinema."

"Bit parts, Mr. Pons. I've been off the stage for about a year. I met Winifred as a result of my stage work, and since it was, I believe, the basis for her father's disapproval of me; I abandoned it."

Pons smiled, wished him good hunting in his search for clues about the dog's disappearance, and went on into the house, only to be met just beyond the entrance by Miss Winifred Rowan, who gave us a glance of mute appeal. Behind her, Miss Megan Rowan, Sir Alexander's testy sister, looked upon us with poorly concealed disdain and made it clear and emphatic in her entire manner that she thought us intruders who had taken advantage of a man who was mentally sick. Moreover, her replies to Pons's cursory questions left us in no doubt; she shared her niece's conviction that Sir Alexander was losing his mind.

Sir Alexander himself, seen in the light of mid-morning, was not

a heartening spectacle. His face was lined and haggard, not alone with age and sleeplessness, but with manifest fear. His hands trembled a little, but this morning the slight odour of rum which had permeated his rooms on the previous night was absent; this fortification, however, would not have been amiss. I paid him the closest attention during the conversation Pons and he carried on, and was struck by the curious way in which he looked over his shoulder every little while, as if he feared an attack from behind, and by the troubled manner in which his eyes wandered; so that I did not find it difficult to understand how his sister and his daughter could believe in his derangement.

After luncheon the sun came out, and Pons again expressed a desire to walk about the countryside. After all, he pointed out, we were too seldom away from London, and we ought to take fullest possible advantage of a day in the country.

"A day," I cried. "There is no evidence that we won't be here a week."

"My dear Parker, how you belittle my poor talents! I fancy another twenty-four hours or so will see an end of this business."

"You have clearly seen more than I have," I said.

"On the contrary, everything presented to me has been presented to you also. But while you, and Sir Alexander as well, have proceeded along the obvious lines, I have chosen to follow a different course. Either Sir Alexander is the victim of a mental breakdown, or he is not. You have sought every evidence to prove that his is a mental case; I had on the contrary only to look about me to discover every evidence that it is quite the contrary—he is a victim not of his own mind, but of someone else's."

"You speak as if you knew him."

"The identity of the culprit is so elementary that it is needless to discuss it. The *modus operandi* is the moot point. I fancy we shall soon witness a change of method. We are dealing with a clever, unscrupulous rogue, who does not lack for a tremendous egotism."

"You speak with such confidence that I am almost reluctant to point out that Sir Alexander does betray very definite signs of mental derangement."

"Undoubtedly."

"Are you changing your mind, then?"

"Certainly not. Sir Alexander was meant to betray such signs."

"Do you doubt the sincerity of Miss Winifred?"

"Not in the slightest. She is honestly concerned, and honestly convinced that her father's mind is failing. It was meant that she should be. It was meant that all of them in that house should be."

"What then is the motive for these events?"

"Why, surely it can be but one of two: either it is hoped that Sir Alexander's heart will give out as a result of fright, or that he will be adjudged mentally incompetent and the management of his affairs pass to someone else."

"His son!"

"I have not had the honour of reading Sir Alexander's will. You have a disappointingly professional mind, Parker. I would caution you to observe that there are other ends which may be as immediate as money."

"But in that case—what does the removal of the mastiff signify?"

"Come, come, Parker—surely it is evident that the mastiff had to be removed for two reasons: primarily because it was quite possible that, even though the dog knew the miscreant who was bringing about the 'vision' Sir Alexander saw on the north wall—recall that he emphasized last night that he saw the thing especially on the north wall—he might disturb the family sufficiently to attract attention to him; secondarily, because the strange absence of the dog could contribute still more to Sir Alexander's fright. It is all of a piece, and you, who know my methods, ought properly to have applied them."

"I have mistaken the point of beginning," I said soberly.

"Yes, the newspaper article was the point of beginning—or perhaps even the coincidental death of Sir James McLeen four months ago. The curious events which have frightened Sir Alexander are not the effects of the curse by any means, nor is the curse their reason for being; no, the curse is simply being used, no more. Sir James McLeen's death, followed by the lurid newspaper article, gave rise to the diabolical plot of which Sir Alexander was picked to be the victim. With any luck, we may be able to forestall the projected ending of this little melodrama."

Pons would say no more, but directly upon our return to the house, now shadowed by the late afternoon sun, he went up to Sir Alexander's rooms. The baronet looked up anxiously at our entrance; he had been playing chess with Kennerly, who got to his feet and would have left the room, had Pons not signaled to him to remain.

"I have only two more questions to ask, Sir Alexander," said Pons.

"Yes?" asked the old man.

"On the occasions of your seeing this spectral miniature of Siva, was it ever still?"

"No, not that I recall. It always seemed to move, to float away from me."

Pons nodded with satisfaction. "Now then, try to think back, Sir Alexander. Can you remember ever hearing anything whatever on the occasion of your sight of this spectral image?"

The baronet slowly shook his head, his eyes puzzled.

"Nothing? Think, man; it is of the utmost importance."

Here Kennerly interjected himself. "Begging your pardon, sir, but you did say that one night—you said—"

"Yes, that's right, Kennerly," said the baronet with more animation than he had shown at any time previously. "I did once or twice hear a sound I thought was like—well, like a clock being wound, only steadily, a kind of whirring sound."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Well, sir, I think we may say that we shall soon have this ghost laid for you."

"I am not going mad then? I have actually seen things?"

"You have seen things you were meant to see, Sir Alexander. You will hear from me again before you retire tonight."

I was awakened from a doze into which I had fallen in the room's only easy-chair by Pons's hand on my shoulder, and his whispered, "Come, Parker. The game is afoot." I started awake. Save for a small lamp beside our bed, the room was in darkness.

"What time is it?"

"Close to midnight. The house has settled down. Come."

He led the way silently into the hall, and in darkness we went down to the door of Sir Alexander's room, upon which Pons rapped quietly and called out in a low voice to identify himself. In a few moments the bolt was drawn, the door opened cautiously, then swung wide as Sir Alexander recognized us. Pons and I slipped into the room.

"What is it?" asked the old man uncertainly.

"We are effecting a change of rooms, Sir Alexander," said Pons composedly. "If I may, I want to borrow your dressing-robe, your steamer rug, your skullcap. And that leaded cane I see over there; I daresay I may have a use for it. Thank you."

Pons offered no explanation; Sir Alexander asked for none. He took Pons's decision like a military man responding to orders, and within a few moments we had completed the exchange; Sir Alexander was ensconced in our old room, and we were in his.

"Do you now conceal yourself, Parker, behind that chest of drawers near the door," said Pons, while he took up Sir Alexander's position in the old man's chair; in the half-light, there was a remarkable resemblance between them, and a casual glimpse would not have detected the difference.

"What in the devil are we doing here?" I asked.

"Waiting for the ghost of Siva. Unless I am badly mistaken, I think a major attempt will be made tonight to bring matters to a head. My talents may be modest, but there is no need of daring them too much—is that not the way a criminal might reason? Or a scoundrel at least, eh? Now, then, let us be still."

The midnight hour struck, and the minute hand crept slowly around toward one. The old house was quiet, and the only sounds to invade the room were the soft, keening voices of a pair of owls, and the harsh booming of nightjars coasting down the sky. It was not yet one o'clock when I felt rather than heard Pons stir, and at once I became more alert, anxious to miss nothing. Was it a rustle I heard? Was it someone in the hall? In my eagerness I almost gave the show away by calling to ascertain if Pons had heard, but I caught myself in time.

A furtive tapping sounded on the door. I looked over at Pons, who shook his head silently. Once again the tap sounded, a little more peremptorily this time.

In a hoarse, quavering voice, Pons called out, "Who is it?"

Then he got up and shuffled over to the door, not, however, forgetting to carry with him, concealed in the folds of his dressing-robe, the leaded cane which he had elected to use as a weapon.

The place where I stood offered me a view of the threshold; and I turned to face the doorway as Pons threw open the door. I do not know what I expected to see there, I do not know what Pons anticipated, but the reality was most unnerving and almost demoralizing; what would have happened to Sir Alexander if he had been confronted in this fashion by the spectacle that met our eyes, is difficult to guess. For what stood on the threshold and seemed to lean into the room, whistling eerily, was nothing less than a great glowing image of Siva, a terrifying vision filling the doorway. Only for a moment did it stand there; then it seemed to rise up and tower

above Pons, who cringed before it as no doubt Sir Alexander might have cringed. A solitary threatening movement caused Pons to fall back; then the thing would have retreated, but Pons's backward movement was a falling away designed only to permit him to grasp and swing the leaded cane he carried.

Before the creature in the doorway could dodge, the cane swung around and crashed down against the side of its head with a horrible tearing sound, which I realized almost at once was the crushing and ripping of papier-mâché. The creature lunged for Pons, but at the same time that I leapt forward in response to Pons's call, the cane landed once more, and this time reached its objective, for the thing slumped grotesquely and collapsed on the floor.

"Lights, Parker," said Pons, breathing fast as he stepped back.

I turned up the lights and saw that from beneath the cleverly wrought likeness of Siva projected a pair of very human legs. Under the light, the glow had disappeared, and the papier-mâché of the costume seemed almost drab. But on the instant I understood the secret of that horrifying glow.

"Phosphorus!" I exclaimed, looking over at Pons, who was matter-of-factly removing Sir Alexander's dressing-robe and skullcap; the steamer rug had fallen from his shoulders when he had delivered the first blow.

"Yes, yes, of course," replied Pons impatiently. "Surely that was patent? You saw it yourself in the hall last night, though I have no way of knowing how you interpreted it. Now then, come along, before the others get here."

Already there were sounds of movement in the rooms adjoining the hall.

"Aren't you stopping to see. . . ?" I said to Pons's retreating back.

"What need? My dear fellow, it is only too obvious that it is young Saring. Come along. We have yet to verify one aspect of the matter."

He darted from the room, down and across the hall, and into Saring's room, the door of which stood partly open. Here he stood for a moment in soundless concentration; then he went to the closet and began to examine Saring's luggage, where he quickly found what he sought—the tiny, phosphorescent image of Siva, the thin thread which had drawn it along the hall and the garden wall, and the electric contrivance and reel which served to draw the spectral







miniature along the hall floor and into the room through the slightly open door, giving the illusion of having disappeared.

When we emerged from the room, Sir Alexander was coming down the hall, Miss Winifred stood on her threshold, looking with horror across to her father's room, and Miss Megan had appeared.

"We have caught the scoundrel, Sir Alexander," said Pons gravely, and, taking the baronet's arm, he drew him into his rooms and closed the door behind him, admonishing me to give my attention to Miss Winifred, who had plainly recognized the clothing and legs projecting from beneath the elaborate costume worn by Geoffrey Saring in the furtherance of his diabolical scheme.

What took place behind the closed door of Sir Alexander's rooms, I did not know; but shortly after Pons emerged from the room, Kennerly appeared to drive us back to our lodgings in London. Pons said no word until we were on our way into the city, driving under that same moon, smaller still, which had spilled its wan light upon the earth only the previous night.

"You are silent, Parker; did Saring's unmasking surprise you?"

I admitted that it had astonished me.

"You had fixed upon Ransom, of course. Ransom was not without guilt, but he had nothing to do with it. The matter really turned upon the character of our client. The most reliable witnesses for him were his daughter and Kennerly. Kennerly admitted that Sir Alexander was 'difficult,' but, clearly enough for anyone to see, he intimated that the old man had his reasons. These were manifest. And obviously his distrust of Geoffrey Saring was not ill-founded, however slender may have been its reasons for existing.

"Furthermore, the entire matter rested upon one fundamental decision: either Sir Alexander saw the things he described, or he did not. Everyone was quite willing to believe that he had not seen them, most particularly since both Ransom and Saring had reluctantly admitted they had seen nothing. I had no alternative but to act upon the assumption that Sir Alexander saw precisely what he described. Once I had formed this conviction, I had only to look for evidence. There was no lack of it. For one thing, the mysterious calling card was doubtless abstracted and replaced with a blank card in the interval between its receipt and its re-examination. For another, I detected despite some manifest attempt to eradicate it, evidence of phosphorus along the wall of the hall at the skirting-board. Phosphorus had immediately suggested itself in the course of Sir Alexander's narrative. Finally, the phosphorus led to Saring's

threshold and there stopped. While this was not conclusive in itself, taken in connection with two other inescapable factors, it was.

"The first of these quite clearly was the fact that both Ransom and Saring lied in denying they had seen anything. Both had seen the image quite well; each had his own reasons for denying sight of it. One because he was its author, the other because he saw no reason why he should spoil a game which would benefit him also. The second of these factors was the motive: this seemed quite manifestly to be an attempt to have Sir Alexander declared mentally incompetent, and only secondarily to bring about his death. Now, Ransom would not particularly benefit by having his brother declared mentally incompetent; he would benefit only by his death. It was he who gambled on Saring's game. It was Saring who would benefit—an actor without a stage, a young man without an occupation, a fortune-hunter, in short, whose marriage was being opposed with what must have seemed to him particularly galling baselessness; for once the old man's mind was suspect, his opposition to his daughter's marriage would be suspect, too. A diabolical plan, Parker, but it might have worked. Its mechanics were well wrought, but simple, too.

"For instance, you did not suspect Saring primarily because his manner was engaging, and because he told us so disarmingly about the way in which he had been called back upstairs by our client to witness the spectral image moving down the hall. It did not occur to you that it was quite within the bounds of possibility for Saring to have tripped his machine, tapped on Sir Alexander's door as he passed, and hurried downstairs before the baronet got to the door to open it. The plan was so simple that you would have rejected it even if I had suggested it. And you were deceived by his by-play at the gate, where instead of looking for clues to the dog's disappearance, he was examining the ground lest he had left anything for me to discover."

"Yet he was one of the most firm in suggesting that Sir Alexander call you in," I objected.

"His scheme called for as much self-confidence as my investigations." He laughed. "We have had a good day and a long day of it, Parker. An interesting matter but one which might well have been fatal. Fortunately for Sir Alexander's frightened determination, it was not. What a pity young Saring did not keep his special talents for the stage!"

## *The Adventure of the Missing Huntsman*

MY FRIEND SOLAR PONS laid a persuasive hand on my arm and slowed our progress along Praed Street not far from our quarters at Number 7. "Gently, Parker," he said. "What do you make of that lady across the street?"

I followed the direction of his gaze and saw an attractive young woman, contemptuous of the wild March wind, striding up the street and turning to go back. She had a good figure, and golden blonde hair worn long in the face of the growing trend toward the shorter style. As she walked, she struck at the calf of her right leg absently with a stick, and from time to time glanced up toward the windows of our quarters.

"She appears to be contemplating a visit to you," I said, "but cannot quite make up her mind."

"Ah," said Pons. "I thought her a young lady of singular determination."

"From the country," I said. "See how she walks."

"An equestrian," added Pons. "Observe how she strikes at her leg; that is a horsewoman's gesture."

"I put her age at thirty-five or so," I went on.

"And moneyed," said Pons. "Her clothing appears to be conservative in cut but even from here it is evident that it is of excellent quality. And I should not be surprised to find that that little sports car up the street is hers. She has driven to town, on impulse, and is now reconsidering that impulse."

"Or she has been to call and, not finding us in, was reluctant to wait."

"No, I think not," said Pons with annoying self-assurance. "She might have come down to sit in her car, but not to pace the street. She appears to be a young lady who cares nothing for the opinions of others or the attention she has already attracted. See there—and there," added Pons, pointing to pedestrians whose eyes had been caught by the lady and who had halted their own progress to fix their gaze upon her.

"But here we are," said Pons, as we reached Number 7, "and our

would-be client is still so engrossed in her problem that she is not aware of our arrival."

We mounted to our quarters, where Pons crossed directly to the windows facing the street and gazed down. I came up behind him and saw that the lady had now come to a pause and stood looking directly across at us. And then, as if she had caught sight of us, she strode into the street with the intention of crossing to Number 7.

"Ah," said Pons, falling back and rubbing his hands, his eyes alight. "We shall soon learn what troubles her."

The lady Mrs. Johnson ushered into our quarters within a few minutes proved to be uncommonly attractive, with a sensitivity of features which the stubborn set of her chin did not diminish. Her violet eyes met Pons's gaze boldly.

"Mr. Pons, I am Diana Pomfroy," she said at once. "My husband is Colonel Ashton Pomfroy."

"Joint-Master of the Wycherly," replied Pons, and then turned to introduce me.

Our client acknowledged me with a courteous inclination of her head and turned again to Pons. "Then you will have read of the tragedy?"

"A man trampled to death by one of your horses—and the loss of your Joint-Master, Captain Dion Price. Pray sit down, Mrs. Pomfroy."

She took Pons's favourite chair at the fireplace, and Pons leaned up against the mantel facing her.

"I may have come on a fool's errand, Mr. Pons," she began, sitting well forward in her chair, as if eager to impress upon us the importance of her words, "but I could not hold off any longer. There is something very much wrong at Pomfroy Chase. It is almost a month now that they found that man—and Mr. Pons, I should say at once that I saw the body—a horrible sight, and while I know that the inquest was conducted correctly, I cannot believe that everything was allowed to come out. Perhaps I feel some guilt myself because I did not say what I knew and what I suspected."

"And what was it that you knew, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"Mr. Pons, the dead man—whom no one could identify—was wearing a waistcoat that belonged to Captain Price. I know because I happened to see it when Mrs. Parks was repairing a small tear for him, and I saw the repair on the waistcoat the dead man wore."

"And suspected?"

"I hardly know how to say it," said our client, lacing her fingers

together, "but I couldn't escape the impression that the dead man had been *beaten* before he blundered into the stallion's stall. I could not understand how certain welts he bore could have been made by hooves. But then, I was unable to understand too how he could have blundered into that stall—the stallion's a brute, Mr. Pons, a fine horse, but a brute. Was it chance? Or was he guided there? Or worse—pushed into it? The day we found the body, Captain Price disappeared—or rather, he was gone—he was last seen the previous afternoon—and ever since then there has been such tension at Pomfroy Chase—as if everyone were holding his breath for fear of something to come."

Our client reflected something of that tension herself, noticeably. She was now more agitated than she had been on her entrance, though only clenched fingers and pursed lips betrayed her.

"I recall that some effort was made to identify the dead man," said Pons.

"Oh, yes. Though his head was badly mutilated, a police artist drew a likeness and it was circulated in the newspapers, together with a full description of his clothing, though that was really very little, what he wore was so ordinary. Yet he was carrying a revolver, one chamber of which was empty and evidently recently discharged. He must have been an itinerant—a tramp or a labourer of some kind looking for work."

"Did he apply for it?"

"Not to our knowledge."

"Did anyone hear a gun discharged during the night?"

"No one reported it, Mr. Pons."

"A revolver shot could hardly have been so commonplace as to have gone unheard, if the weapon were discharged near the house. What of yourself—or Colonel Pomfroy?"

"Mr. Pons, we were away from home until shortly after midnight."

"Was any search made for a bullet, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"I cannot say, but I doubt it. Since no one heard a shot fired, I believe it was assumed that the shot was fired away from the house."

"Did anyone report having seen this man prior to the discovery of his body?"

"No, Mr. Pons." She sighed. "But, of course, someone must have seen him. How else could he have got hold of Captain Price's waistcoat?"

"He might have stolen it," suggested Pons.

"I suppose that is true," she said doubtfully.

"Captain Price," said Pons. "How old is he?"

"Thirty-nine. He was appointed Joint-Master with my husband seven years ago. He is a friend of Lady Cleve."

"And the age of the dead man?"

"They put it at about forty. Not over forty-five, Mr. Pons."

"The staff outside the house itself," pressed Pons. "What of them?"

"Well, of course, John Ryan is our First Whip, Reggie Bannan our Second, and O'Rourke our Third. Then, of course, there are the servants in the stables. The Hunt servants and our four horsemen were all appointed by Captain Price. We established the Hunt seven years ago and we've had a close and friendly relationship with Captain Price ever since. We dislike to believe that he may not return—that something may have happened to him."

"And what is it you ask of me, Mrs. Pomfroy?"

"Oh, if I could say precisely! To learn who the dead man was—to lift the tension at Pomfroy Chase—and, yes, to find Captain Price." She hesitated, caught her lower lip between her white teeth, and added, "If he is alive."

"I see. I take it you have some reason to feel that he may be dead."

She shook her head. "It is only unreasoning fear, Mr. Pons. That man—the dead man—had the same kind of figure Captain Price had; he wore his waistcoat well, as if it had been made for him—but of course, he had a beard, and Captain Price was clean-shaven."

"When you last saw him."

"Yes."

"And that was?"

"Ten days ago. I spent a week in London recently, Mr. Pons."

"But you don't yourself know whether Captain Price was clean-shaven at the time of his disappearance?"

"No, Mr. Pons. I must rely on the Whips, who make no mention of any change in Captain Price. They saw him as late as six o'clock that evening—of the night during which the man was killed in the stall. I have spoken with them."

"I shall speak with them," said Pons.

"Oh, I don't know that it would be wise," demurred our client. "They seemed reluctant to speak. Would it not be best if you and

Dr. Parker were to come for the Meet next Thursday and remain at Pomfroy Chase as our guests? I should like your inquiry to be discreet."

Pons smiled wryly. "Murder—if murder is involved—can hardly be discreet, Mrs. Pomfroy. And it may be tantamount to murder to expect Dr. Parker to ride to hounds."

I protested indignantly. "I believe I can acquit myself as well as you."

"We shall see."

"Then you will come, Mr. Pons?"

"We will present ourselves at Pomfroy Chase in time for the Meet, Mrs. Pomfroy."

"Oh, thank you!" cried our client, as she came to her feet in a swift, supple movement.

"Do be good enough to show Mrs. Pomfroy to her car, Parker," said Pons.

When I returned, I found Pons deep in one of his carefully compiled files on interesting people and criminous events in Great Britain.

Without looking up, he explained, "Our client mentioned Lady Cleve, and I seem to recall making an entry on the lady some years ago. Ah, here we are. Lord Cleve, His Majesty's personal representative in Ireland. Eight years back. 'Daring Attempt to Kidnap Lady Cleve Frustrated.' Let me see," he went on, reading in a low voice as if to himself, "'A daring daylight attempt to kidnap Ethel, Lady Cleve, by members of the Irish Republican Army was frustrated by a rebel, Sean O'Leary, widely known by his sobriquet, 'The Black Prince,' and a handful of his followers, who interrupted the attempt even as Lady Cleve was being taken from her carriage in a Dublin street by terrorists. No effort was made to harm Lady Cleve. The attempt was evidently planned to force a compromise in the attitude of Lord Cleve in negotiations with representatives of the Irish Republican Army.'" He paused, then resumed. "'Born Ethel Stewart, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Francis Stewart, Chelmsford, Essex.' That would make her Scottish in ancestry."

"I'm afraid I cannot see the relevance of Lady Cleve's ancestry," I said.

He laughed. "Nor I."

"But what happened to the kidnappers and the other men who thwarted them?"



"Oh, they got into a battle among themselves and the Black Prince escorted Lady Cleve to safety. Once she was free, the rebels vanished from the street."

"They probably repaired to the nearest pub and spent the night in tall talk," I said. "But, seriously, Pons—do you intend to go to the Meet?"

"It ought to be a welcome diversion," said Pons.

"What is to be gained by such violent exercise? Will it help you solve the mystery at Pomfroy Chase?"

"Perhaps," said Pons enigmatically. "It will at least give me the acquaintance of the Whips who show every sign, if our client is to be believed, of not having told all they know."

"Mrs. Pomfroy herself seems to be unsure about your role," I pointed out.

"Does she not!" cried Pons, delightedly. "Her little problem intrigues me. I do not recall anything similar in my experience. The victim is dead and buried almost a month—the Joint-Master has vanished." He paused suddenly, reflectively. "I did not recall our client's giving us the verdict of the inquest," he said. "Let us just look it up."

He turned to the back of his most recent file, and took from it a packet of clippings he had not yet had opportunity to enter. He went rapidly through them, reading titles aloud as he went. "The Framblehurst Arms murder. The Swansea mystery. Manchester double murder. Ah—'Death by Misadventure Verdict at Pomfroy Chase.'—I fancy it might not be amiss to reread the published accounts of the matter."

He settled himself to read again the trio of clippings which pertained to the Pomfroy mystery, but if he saw anything of interest in them, his expressionless face told me nothing. When at last he discarded the clippings and looked up, his face was reflective.

"Dr. Michael Paradine," he said, "is apparently the man we should talk to first."

"Who is he?"

"The examining physician. There is nothing in the published accounts our client has not already imparted."

"Pons, have you considered that this may indeed be a wild goose chase? That the matter may be exactly what the inquest determined?"

"Oh, I have considered it, but also discarded the thought," said Pons. "I submit our client's concern is well grounded. Even if we

grant death by misadventure, we still have the problem of the missing huntsman. But I am unwilling to grant even so much. The situation presents some interesting aspects. Consider that our client made no mention of anything untoward taking place at Pomfroy Chase prior to the night of the—let us just say, 'accident.' She held everything to be normal, I take it, or she would have said so. She would appear to be a young lady who is keenly sensitive to impressions. She related none. Then a man is found dead in the stallion's stall. The stallion was known to be a brute. The fellow might have been a vagrant, but Mrs. Pomfroy does not think so, because he was wearing Captain Price's waistcoat. And Captain Price is missing. Since then there seems to be a continuing tension at Pomfroy Chase. Now, does not this chain of events suggest anything to you?"

"For one thing," I said bluntly, "I would like to make a more careful examination of the dead man. I would like to know if his fingerprints and teeth were compared to Price's."

"Ah, that thought had occurred to me," admitted Pons. "It had also occurred to Mrs. Pomfroy, but she cannot believe that the dead man is Captain Price."

"Perhaps because she does not want to believe it."

"Perhaps," conceded Pons. "But I rather think that it would be elementary to rule out Price by the simplest of tests. So let us assume that the dead man was not Price. On that premise hinges another—what had he to do with Price? He wore his waistcoat—a repaired waistcoat, true—so we are left with the conclusion that he either visited Price and was given the waistcoat, or he stole it in Price's absence."

"That seems beyond cavil," I agreed. "But who would steal a worn garment?—one worn to the extent of being repaired?"

"Capital!" cried Pons. "And what do you make of the prevailing tension at Pomfroy Chase?"

"They are fearful that something will be discovered."

"The verdict is in and the case is closed," Pons pointed out. "What have they to fear?"

"Well, then, they are fearful of something to come."

"I submit that is far more likely," said Pons. "But perhaps at this point speculation is idle. We know too little of elementary matters. If Captain Price was abducted, why? If he chose to leave of his own accord, for what reason? The newspaper accounts speak of a 'sum of money' found on the dead man. Surely that is ambiguous! Why not a stated sum? The Meet is two days hence. I think we will just run

down to Cranborne tomorrow and have a word with Dr. Paradine before going on to Pomfroy Chase. Let us wire Mrs. Pomfroy to expect us for dinner tomorrow evening."

The following afternoon found us at Cranborne, waiting upon Dr. Michael Paradine at his office. Dr. Paradine was a gruff, burly man, with cold, piercing dark eyes and a thick moustache worn almost truculently on his upper lip. He had kept us cooling our heels in the waiting-room until Pons had sent in a note—"About the Pomfroy Chase Affair"—whereupon he had seen us at once.

"I am at a loss to understand this, Mr. Pons," he said curtly.

"I have read the published accounts of the matter with great interest," said Pons, choosing his words carefully. "I have had the privilege of speaking with Mrs. Pomfroy. We seem to be alike in the dark."

"Well, sir, you have no advantage over me and I none over you," said Dr. Paradine, smiling frostily.

"You examined the body, doctor. You have the advantage."

"That is true."

"Did you, in fact, find on the dead man's head welts which suggested that he might have been beaten?" asked Pons.

Dr. Paradine looked at us for a few moments in silence. "I found certain welts," he answered at last. "I cannot say that they were the marks of a beating."

"You did not think it likely that they were made by the horse?"

"I cannot say, Mr. Pons."

"Come, come, doctor," pressed Pons. "You must certainly have formed an opinion on the question?"

A fine dew of perspiration had come to show on the doctor's temples. "In my opinion, it was unlikely that the horse made them. They were not fatal. They were made before death, as their colour indicated. The fellow was fearfully mutilated."

"Thank you, doctor. Did any suspicion cross your mind that the dead man might be the missing Captain Price?"

Dr. Paradine smiled. "While they were of somewhat similar proportions, sir, no such suspicion entered my mind."

"One more thing. Newspaper accounts mention that a sum of money was found on the dead man. None mentions how much. You were at the inquest and you may remember the sum, which was certainly brought out at that time."

"One hundred and fifty-seven pounds, Mr. Pons, and some shillings. He was hardly, as some people have suggested, a vagrant."

"It would certainly not seem so. Are you, by any chance, a member of the Wycherly Hunt, doctor?"

"I have that privilege," answered Dr. Paradine somewhat stiffly.

"We will see you again at the Meet," said Pons. "Good-day, doctor."

Dr. Paradine's eyebrows went up. "You are guests of the Master?" he hazarded. Without waiting for Pons's reply, he asked, "Perhaps I could drive you to Pomfroy Chase—unless you have a car of your own?"

"We came by train," said Pons.

"Well, then, if you have no objection, I would consider it a privilege, sir."

Dr. Paradine's frostiness had evaporated; he was now all civility. He left the surgery in the care of his associate, and within a quarter of an hour we were on the road to Pomfroy Chase, which lay out of Cranborne in the direction of Salisbury.

It was soon apparent, however, that the doctor had an ulterior motive, for he plied us with questions, primarily designed to discover Pons's motives in inquiring into the affair at Pomfroy Chase—however delicately, secondarily to learn how much we knew of fox-hunting. Pons acquitted himself satisfactorily enough, without betraying the fact that he was acting for Mrs. Pomfroy, and Dr. Paradine left us at Pomfroy Chase a baffled and disgruntled man, though he was too much the gentleman to show it.

Pomfroy Chase was obviously the home of a wealthy man. It was evidently an old manor-house which had been restored, a long, L-shaped building of stone, three storeys in height, of which the third was a gable storey, broken by dormer windows. The building faced lawns and flower-beds and a handsome, circular driveway, while at the rear stood the kennels, and beyond these, well away from the immediate grounds, a septet of cottages, all of stone, which were clearly part of the estate, and very probably housed some of the Hunt servants.

The butler's reaction to Pons's name indicated that we were expected. We were shown without delay into Mrs. Pomfroy's presence.

"I'm glad you're here, Mr. Pons," she said at once. "I know something is wrong here, I feel it too strongly to ignore. The Hunt servants are so tense I fear for the day's hunting tomorrow."

"Surely it cannot be as bad as that," said Pons reassuringly.

"I know you must think it my fancy, but I assure you it is not," she said fervently. Then, sighing, she added, "But I impose on you. Let me show you to your room—I hope you will not mind sharing it."

"We have been sharing quarters for some years, Mrs. Pomfroy," said Pons dryly.

"Thank you. Please follow me. John will bring your bags."

Our hostess led us up the stairs to a comfortable room, the gable windows of which opened toward the stables and the cottages beyond. Pons crossed to the near window at once and stood looking out.

"I take it those cottages across the meadow are occupied by some of the Hunt servants?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The large house is—was—Captain Price's. Bannan, Ryan, and O'Rourke each has a cottage."

Without turning, Pons asked, "The Meet starts here?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. We try to start at eleven o'clock."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pomfroy."

"Dinner at seven, gentlemen," said our hostess and withdrew.

"I submit there was design in Mrs. Pomfroy's choice of this room for us, Parker," said Pons, chuckling. "We have a fine view of the stage upon which the Hunt servants must perform."

He came back to one of the two beds in the room and flung himself full-length upon it.

"What did you think of Dr. Paradine?" he asked.

"A cautious and ethical man," I replied.

"Pray do not be so defensive. I admire caution and ethics in a medical man, as you well know."

"I daresay he was fearful that there might be some disclosure reflecting upon his judgment," I said.

"I thought as much. In sum, however, his attitude reflects and bolsters our client's. He is certain that the stallion killed the intruder in his stall—but he is not certain the fellow came there by accident. 'Death by misadventure' is ambiguous enough to satisfy no one."

"You postulate the man was murdered. But who would murder a stranger except for money?—which was not taken."

"Ah, Parker, you make progress. I submit that to someone the fellow was not a stranger."

"You are thinking of Captain Price. Do you suggest that Price then killed him?"

"My mind is open on the matter. But I cannot deny that certain suggestive indications offer fascinating solutions to the riddle," said Pons. "For one—it can scarcely be doubted that the two events are in some way connected, though it does not follow that Price murdered the visitor."

"But who then?"

"Ah, I fancy that time and patience will tell us that, Parker."

With that he had finished; he would say nothing further. He composed himself for rest—which, for Pons, meant the consideration of the particular problem which occupied his attention—and so he lay, almost inert, upon the bed until it was time to make ready for dinner.

Our host presided at the dinner-table. Colonel Ashton Pomfroy was at least ten years his wife's senior. He was a ruddy-faced man with quiet blue eyes and a self-assured manner. If our client had told him why Pons and I had been invited to join the Hunt, he gave no indication that it was so; he was courteous almost to being deferential.

There were three other guests at dinner—General Hugh Pomfroy, our host's uncle—a great, shaggy-browed fellow, very hearty of manner—and the Chairman of the Hunt Committee, Richard Codrington—who, with singular punctiliousness invariably addressed our host as "Master," which Colonel Pomfroy's uncle did not always do—and the chairman's wife, who was seated next to me, and thus but one place removed from our hostess, so that conversation at dinner—which was, understandably, primarily of the morrow's Hunt, fell naturally into three divisions—among the two ladies and myself, which was somewhat disconcerting since they seemed to enjoy discovering how much I did not know about fox-hunting—between the Master and the Hunt chairman—and between Pons and General Pomfroy, who held forth pontifically about "some fellow named Pons" he had known "somewhere in France during the war" and was finally convinced that it was Pons's brother Bancroft, though he found it difficult to imagine that "that fellow could be in the Foreign Office," for he had evidently a military man's dubiety about any devotee of ratiocination.

Pons listened, but spoke no more than the proprieties of the occasion demanded, and when dinner was done, excused himself. I followed suit.

But, though Pons had spoken of retiring to his room, he made his way outside the house and around to the kennels where the hounds were quartered.

"Do you know anything about fox hounds, Parker?" asked Pons.

"About as much as I know of fox-hunting," I answered. "What is the size of the pack?"

"Twenty couple, I believe our host put it."

"I gathered that it is to be a large Meet."

"I believe some seventy people will take part."

We stood looking at the hounds, I was certain, with some design on Pons's part, and presently we were discovered by a slender, greying man of perhaps forty, who came casually toward us, his narrowed eyes suggesting that we might not be entirely welcome.

"Is there anything I can do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

"You must be Ryan," ventured Pons.

"Right, sir."

"Dr. Parker and I were wondering whether one of your Hunt servants is not young Jock Britney?"

"I hardly think so, sir," said Ryan. "We have O'Rourke, Callahan, Malone, O'Connor, and Keenan. Not a Britney among them. And none under thirty. You'd hardly call that 'young,' would you, sir?"

Pons laughed. "Ah, well, then, we were misinformed," he said. He turned from contemplation of the hounds, and gestured toward the cottages well off beyond the stables. "Can you tell me, Ryan, who occupies those houses?"

"Sir," answered Ryan with a querulousness rising in his voice, as if he meant to say that this was none of our business, "we live there."

" 'We'?" persisted Pons.

"The big house is Captain Price's—and near it my wife and I live, and then Bannan and his family, and then O'Rourke and his, and so on."

"Ah, no family, Ryan?"

"No, sir," said Ryan stiffly.

"I thought, a moment ago, I saw an old man there," persisted Pons.

"My father's come to visit us for a while." His words were now so short as to be crystal clear. He resented Pons's asking questions, but he did not want to risk offending a guest.

"Ah, yes, Captain Price," murmured Pons. "That was the fellow who disappeared. Did you know him?"

"Sir, we all know Captain Price," said Ryan coldly.

"A good man?"

"None better."

It was now almost painfully clear that Ryan not only disapproved Pons's questions, but had tautened with suspicion of both of us.

"What weather will we have for the Hunt?" asked Pons then.

Ryan visibly relaxed. "A fine day. Some clouds, and a spot of misting rain. Ideal hunting weather, sir."

"This will be your first day's hunting without Captain Price, eh?"

Ryan froze once more. He nodded curtly, but did not trust himself to speak.

"Thank you, Ryan," said Pons.

"You're welcome, sir."

Ryan stood motionless while we walked back toward the house, for the March air had grown increasingly crisp with the dying day. I thought the First Whip's attitude proof of his cold suspicion.

"Surely you gained little by making that fellow suspicious," I said.

"Were not my questions innocuous enough?" asked Pons.

"They were pointless," I cried.

"On the contrary," replied Pons, with a tight smile. "Ryan's replies yielded a wealth of information."

"You cannot mean it!"

"I was never more serious," said Pons. "For one thing—it is now evident that Ryan, at least—and perhaps the others—have good reason to believe Captain Price to be alive—you will have observed Ryan's insistence on speaking of him in the present tense. It is quite possible that they are in touch with him. That is but one of the valuable facets of our little conversation. I am sure that you will, on reflection, think of others. I commend our dialogue to your study, Parker. You know my methods. You have only to apply them."

Questions crowded to my tongue, but I knew it would be useless to ask them. Pons had said all he meant to say.

Looking back, I saw that Ryan was no longer alone. Two other men had joined him, though at a little distance behind him; all three were gazing after us with motionless coldness, as if they meant to see that we did not turn back toward the stables.

Pons anticipated my saying so. "I saw them, Parker," he said. "I fancy we would have had a difficult time nosing about. Nevertheless, I intend to do so if you'll bear with me."

He made his way completely around the front of the house, and



this time came back to the other end of the stables where the horses were kept. We had not gone more than halfway along the stalls when Ryan appeared once more.

"Oh," he said, "it's you again." His voice was like ice.

"Forgive me, Ryan," said Pons persuasively. "I had a fancy to see the stall in which that fellow was killed. Even in London, you see, we read about it."

"I don't wonder," said Ryan, and added, pointing, "That one."

Pons walked over to it under Ryan's watchful eye, looked in, and turned.

"The stallion's out at grass, if you'd like to see him," said Ryan sarcastically.

"It would be interesting to hear what he has to say," said Pons, "if I could only talk his language."

Ryan said nothing.

Pons walked past him, thanking him once more.

This time he had finished. We walked into the house and up to our room, where Pons made himself comfortable with every sign of meaning to stay where he was until morning.

"Was there anything about the stall worth seeing?" I asked.

"You saw where it lies," said Pons. "I submit it would have been considerably easier to blunder into several other stalls before reaching the stallion's. It gives one food for thought, does it not?"

I agreed that it did. "It suggests that he was led or brought there. But again, if not robbery, what was the motive?"

"Ah, Parker, that grows with every hour the most intriguing question of this little puzzle. Indeed, unless I am very much mistaken, the solution to the events at Pomfroy Chase rests in it."

With this I had to be content, for he retreated into a copy of *Insurrections Against His Majesty's Government*, which he had brought along from our quarters in Praed Street.

The Hunt breakfast, for all its informality, was a gala affair, and a colourful one, with the field in pink and their ladies in dark garb. Our hostess had seen that we, too, had clothing appropriate to the occasion. The members and guests stood about, inside and out, drinking coffee and eating the food set out on the sideboard and the table, and the hum of conversation filled the air.

After a few words with our hostess, Pons made his way outside, where he stood watching the scene. The Master was busy with Ryan

and Bannan, who were also in pink, but at sight of Pons and me, he detached himself briefly and came over.

"Gentlemen, Ryan will bring around your mounts in good time."

"Thank you, Master," said Pons—quite as if he had been riding to hounds all his life.

Some members of the Meet had already finished and were mounted. The hounds had been brought out—twenty couple, as Pons had said. They sat or milled about, keeping close together, in an open space among the horses. The Whips were not far away. An air of expectation hung over the scene, and everyone waited on the edge of awareness of the event about to take place.

"How many Hunt servants do you count, Parker?" asked Pons.

I looked among the crowd. "Two," I said.

"Were there not four?"

"So Ryan said."

At this moment General Pomfroy caught sight of us and came bustling over. "Ah, Mr. Pons," he boomed, "I forgot to ask you last night in what capacity you served the Foreign Office." He had clearly, in the course of the night, convinced himself that Pons and his old military acquaintance were one and the same.

"Cryptography," said Pons without hesitation.

"Ah, fascinating, fascinating!" said the General, and launched into an account of an adventure of his own in military intelligence in France, an interminable tale which was interrupted by nothing and no one until the Master walked past to say, "Hounds, gentlemen, please!"

One of the Whips had come up with our mounts. Pons lifted himself to his horse with considerably more agility than I, but I fancied I sat my mount more securely than he, for he seemed to crane this way and that as if determined to take in everything at once—the hounds forward, the three Whips—the Master on his mount—our client in a little group leading the way after the hounds, leisurely—Ryan riding forward to join Bannan near the Master—Bannan carrying two poles, one of which he thrust forward at Ryan as Ryan came up—General Pomfroy mounting as if he were engaged in storming the battlements of a fortress—the Chairman of the Hunt off to one side, looking a little anxiously at the weather, which was now dark and louring with a northeast wind and the smell of rain in it, though no rain had fallen.

The hounds moved in silence; here and there a tail whipped to

and fro; the voices of the Whips cajoled and commanded. The field made a straggling party in the van of the hounds, with the distance widening between hounds and field; a babble of talk rose among the field in one place, subsiding in another. The field moved across the dark landscape in the grey morning like a great flower unfolding, going steadily away from Pomfroy Chase in the general direction of Salisbury, across a dale, between a knoll and a rambling copse, out upon the slopes.

The wind felt raw, but Pons did not seem to mind it. He rode now more easily, having settled in to it, and having established for himself where the Hunt servants were and where the Master was; but he rode alert, I saw, as if he waited upon the first music of the hounds.

It came with startling suddenness when the hounds gave tongue. An instant later the cry "Gone away!" rang forth, and the field plunged forward. The hounds boiled out over the valley, their music ringing wild on the wind. From Huntsman to field and back among the other members the cry was passed that a dog-fox had been viewed, the hounds were hot on his scent.

What had been leisurely was now charged with urgent action. The hounds streamed across the slopes; the field strove to close the distance between; and the music of the hounds filled the morning, beating back the dark clouds, the threat of rain, and the chill that had seemed so omnipresent an hour before. Countryside, hounds, pink-clad huntsmen and, somewhere ahead, a dog-fox running for his life were all the morning—all else belonged to another world, and the excitement of the chase filled me, as it filled Pons, too, for he urged his mount forward, passing several of the field in his insistence.

But the area was difficult country. The flat of it had quickly given way to knolls, coppices, and an occasional rock, and the fox in his cunning led hounds and field through the most rugged parts of it. The field spread out and came together again. Ryan and Bannan were hard on the heels of the pack; the Master, as far as I could see, rode at the head of the field, with the Chairman of the Hunt Committee not far behind, and our hostess with six other women were close by. Pons was now well ahead of me; I caught sight of him from time to time, riding hard, just in advance of the ladies. General Pomfroy had fallen back—a lone figure bringing up the rear. Ahead, I could see the Whips and the Hunt servants—

four of them, though I could have sworn we had started with but two.

The hounds came to a sudden stop, boiling around in confusion, and two of the Whips rode forward to help start them again. Whining, yelping, baying, the hounds set off in one direction, returned, set off in another. The Whips turned them again, back to the old line, and the pack streamed forward once more, the confusion gone from their voices, their bugling once again riding the wind and falling to ear in this place like a melody of Schubert risen to intoxicate one's senses in the concert hall.

The moments of hesitation and confusion, brief as they were, had enabled the field in the lead to close much of the gap between them and the pack, though the hounds were widening it once more. The cry of the hounds, the shouts of the Whips, Ryan blowing the Huntsman's horn, the renewed "Holla-ing" ringing down the wind, charged the morning again with excitement.

Pons had fallen back; now he was urging his mount forward again, using his crop. General Pomfroy had almost caught up. The Hunt Chairman wheeled from time to time to gaze, troubled, at the heavens. And now and then a drizzle of mist or rain whipped into my face. The clouds threatened to end the hunt before the hounds could find.

Up ahead, the hounds swept up the slope of a bush-crowned knoll which fell away sharply on the far side in a tangle of undergrowth—up and over, the music giving way briefly to a *mélange* of confused yelping, and then they swept into view again. The Whips and the leaders of the field followed—and then suddenly the Huntsman's horn called hounds off, a babble of voices rose, and the Hunt came to a stop. The field slowed to a halt on top of the knoll, though Pons had gone over.

The Master had dismounted and stood pale-faced and silent, almost encircled by the Whips and the horsemen. Something had happened. Perhaps one of the field had taken a bad spill. The Master found his voice. "Dr. Paradine," he called, and Dr. Paradine pressed forward on his mount just as I came to the edge of the knoll and saw what lay below.

It was the body of a man, certainly not one of the field, for he was roughly clad. Only a cursory glance was necessary to suggest that he had been resting or sleeping there, and that one of the horses had delivered a fatal blow to his head, for it was broken in,

and blood was spilled from it. The road across the valley was not far away, and the fellow had very probably wandered in during the night, for the place of his concealment was well protected from the weather, though the plunging horses had torn away some of the vegetation there.

Dr. Paradine, who had bent over the body, now straightened up, shaking his head.

"Dead, Master," I heard him say.

I saw Pons press unobtrusively forward and in turn make a rapid examination of the body, while Ryan looked over his shoulder at him in hostile amazement.

The tableau held but for a moment. The restless hounds crowded about, whining uneasily; voices rose querulously from the rear of the field. But the Hunt had lost its excitement in the tragedy before us, and the Master, remounting, announced, "We will return to the house, ladies and gentlemen," and turned his mount to lead the way.

I fell back from the main body of the field and waited upon Pons to ride up. His face, when he came abreast of me, was impassive, but his eyes glinted oddly.

"A shocking thing!" I said. "Was that fellow killed by one of the riders?"

"The wound in his head would indicate that he was certainly killed by something in the shape of a horse's hoof," said Pons cryptically.

"Who was first over the knoll?"

"I was unable to see."

"He must have wandered in off the road. Strange that the hounds did not wake him."

"Unless he were sodden with liquor," said Pons.

"True."

We rode for a few moments in silence. We were now well separated from the rest of the field, and Pons, I saw, rode with deliberate leisureliness because he was deep in thought. He turned to me presently, guiding his mount nearer.

"Would you not say, Parker, that anyone spending last night out-of-doors would have been rather wet with dew?"

"I would indeed."

"His clothes were not damp."

"Well, of course, he lay under bushes which would give him some protection."

"The scent presumably carried straight over him," continued Pons. "Would you say that is consistent with ferine behaviour?"

"No. It would seem to me that the fox could be aware of a man's presence in time to avoid stepping upon him," I conceded. "Yet, coming up the knoll and dropping over—it is just possible. . . ."

"But unlikely," continued Pons. "The hounds divided and went around him. They were therefore aware of his presence. The fox could hardly have been less aware. I submit that no fox was ever near him."

"I'm afraid the evidence of the hounds must be set against that," I said. "They were clearly on the scent."

"You will recall that at one point the hounds were confused. There were two lines, one crossing the other. The hounds were bound for the fresher; they were whipped off and put on the other."

"I suppose it isn't unusual to put up a second fox."

"There was no second fox. The only fox was the dog-fox we were hunting. I submit he was never near the sleeping man."

"The hounds would never have left the scent!"

"Unless they were misled by a false scent made by a fresh fox, a bagged fox, or even a recently taken dead fox."

"Pons!" I cried. "You can't mean murder!"

"It is something like that fellow found in the stallion's stall. Here, too, no one seemed to know him. He was, once again, therefore a stranger, but whether to everyone remains to be seen. His clothing, as I said, was rough, of decent quality, but of a kind worn only by someone not accustomed to expensive clothing. His hands were rough, also, and the calluses on them suggest that he was habitually engaged in some menial labour; there are certain indications that he was accustomed to using a trowel, and I should conclude that he was a mason by trade when there was work for him, though his hands are also accustomed to the use of a shovel. It was evident only when one came close to him that he reeked of whisky. Unless I am mistaken, he carried inside his clothing a long, thin weapon in the shape of a poniard. I rather fancy no startling amount of money will be found on him, but the presence of the weapon will disconcert the authorities."

"It disconcerts me," I admitted.

"Ah, Parker, if you have correctly assessed the facts in the matter, it ought to fall into place with little difficulty."

I might have replied, but held my tongue, for General Pomfroy

had caught sight of us lagging behind, and waited for us to come up to him.

"Rum go, what!" he boomed as we came up. "The Master's in a black rage—can't say I blame him. First it was that fellow who blundered into Prince's stall, and now this drunken vagrant wandering into the field. Ought to have laws against that sort of thing."

In this vein General Pomfroy continued until we reached Pomfroy Chase and separated to go to our quarters.

Pons lost no time in getting out of his hunting attire and into his own clothes once more. He seemed deep in thought and paced up and down our room for a few moments. He crossed to the windows and looked down. From where I stood, I could see the hounds being brought in, and our mounts being returned to the stables. An air of sobriety prevailed, with the Whips and the kennel staff going about their business in intent silence.

"I must go out and about," said Pons abruptly. "Are you coming?"

"I'm sorry, Pons. I must beg off," I said. "An hour afield has given me aches I haven't had for a long time."

Pons chuckled and left the room.

In a few minutes I saw him walking between the stables in the general direction of the cottages. I saw, too, that both Ryan and Bannan observed him, and their attitude, even from the distance where I stood at the window, was manifestly unfriendly.

They, like me, stood watching until Pons had passed the row of cottages and begun to walk through the open country beyond. Only then did they visibly relax.

I was awakened from a light doze an hour later when Pons came in. His eyes were twinkling, and he stood, once again, at the windows looking down, rubbing his hands together zestfully.

"There is nothing like a walk in the rain to stimulate logical thinking," he said.

"I never knew you to need it," I said.

"Ah, that is well put, Parker," responded Pons. "It is true, it is facts I went after. For instance—would it surprise you to learn that there is a pet fox kept outside Ryan's cottage?"

"Nothing much ever surprises me when you are on the scent," I said.

"I must say, a little nap sharpens you," said Pons, agreeably. "Are you ready for London?"

"What!" I cried. "You are giving up?"

"Tut, tut! One ought never to jump to conclusions. There is nothing for us to do here for the nonce. The solution of the puzzle is perfectly apparent. I shall be interested to learn what the authorities make of it. I am not disposed to intervene. Let us just get our things together and make our excuses to our host and hostess."

We found Colonel Pomfroy and our client in the drawing-room.

"Ah, Mr. Pons!" cried Colonel Pomfroy. "I had hoped for a word with you! I am half convinced I am the victim of some dastardly plot to ruin the Wycherly!"

"I should not be inclined to think so, Colonel," said Pons gently. "I fancy the solution to the matter lies farther afield."

"Mr. Pons!" cried our client. "You know it then?"

"I hope to resolve the problem directly after the inquest," said Pons with smooth confidence.

"You may need to come back for the inquest, sir," said Colonel Pomfroy.

"I am aware of that. But since no representations have been made to me, I shall feel free to go. You have our address, and we are on the telephone. We expect to return for the proceedings."

"I will have one of the cars brought around to take you to London," said the Colonel.

Our client came to her feet. "And Captain Price?"

"Do not be too sanguine, Mrs. Pomfroy," said Pons. "We may find him only to lose him."

With this enigmatic statement, Pons bade our host and hostess good-day.

For a week Pons watched the newspapers for accounts of the events at Pomfroy Chase. Reasonably good likenesses of the man who had died on the moor were published, but no one came forward to identify him, though descriptions of him were detailed and precise—"Age about 48. Height, 5 feet 9 inches. No identification. Contents of pockets: one pound and sixpence." There was a description of the poniard Pons had felt—"A thin, stiletto-like knife, evidently manufactured by hand. The blade is seven inches in length."

"Lethal enough," commented Pons. He read further, aloud: "The police regret that the presence of the field eliminated any ground clues, but it is presumed that the unknown man wandered



in from the road nearby in an intoxicated condition and sought shelter in the lee of the knoll.' " The post-mortem had disclosed that the dead man had imbibed freely of whisky some hours before his death.

The eighth day found us once again in Cranborne, present at the inquest on the unidentified victim of the Pomfroy Hunt. Pons sat with eyes closed during the preliminary evidence, but he grew alert as soon as Dr. Paradine went into the witness-box and listened intently to the interrogation.

The coroner opened with, "Testimony has been advanced to show that you were the first medical man on the scene, Dr. Paradine. Will you recount your findings?"

"The dead man was lying on his right side in a foetal position. He had evidently been sleeping. A horse's hoof had crushed his left temple. The bone was broken in for a distance of two inches."

"Was it, in your opinion, an accident?"

"It could hardly have been anything else, sir."

"Was death instantaneous?"

"Practically. He was dead when I examined him."

There followed a rather technical discussion which served only to allow Dr. Paradine the stage long enough to establish his authority. In the course of it, Pons took out the little notebook he carried, jotted something down, and passed it up to the coroner, who read it with a frown on his face. He turned then again to Dr. Paradine.

"Doctor, you say the man was dead when you examined him. How long, in your opinion, had he been dead?"

"It could only have been a matter of moments."

"Then blood was still gushing from the wound?"

Dr. Paradine opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again, before he finally answered, "No, sir."

"Would it not have been?"

"Technically, no, if he were dead."

"Only just dead?"

Dr. Paradine looked uncomfortable. "Considerable blood had been spilled. There may still have been seepage from the wound."

"Do you testify that there was?"

"I cannot so testify," said the doctor stiffly.

Dr. Paradine was excused and John Ryan was called.

He came forward warily and was sworn. At the coroner's request he set forth the details of the tragedy on the day of the Hunt. The coroner listened without interruption. Once more Pons's notebook came into action. The coroner looked inquiringly at the public

benches to detect, if possible, the source of the note Pons sent up before he crumpled it and threw it into a wastepaper-basket nearby.

When Ryan had finished, the coroner asked, "Will you tell us what the hounds did, Mr. Ryan?"

"When?" fenced Ryan.

"At the moment they came over the knoll upon the body."

"Why, they divided and swung around on either side of the body."

"But the fox evidently did not?"

Ryan sat for a few moments without answering. Then he said, "Sir, I have no knowledge of that."

"The hounds came together again beyond the body?"

"Yes, sir."

"So that we are to believe the line went straight over the body?"

"Sir, I cannot answer that."

"A pity the hounds could not be called," commented the coroner acidly.

Ryan's colour deepened.

The coroner bent forward again. "Now, Mr. Ryan, in the case of the other unfortunate who was found in the stall at Pomfroy Chase, you testified that you had seen him in the grounds during the evening previous to his death. Had you also seen the man found dead on the moor before?"

"I do not believe so," said Ryan smoothly.

"Let me put it this way," pressed the coroner; "had you ever known him before?"

Ryan was equal to the question which had certainly been prompted by Pons. "Sir, in my capacity as a hunt servant, I have occasion to meet many people. I could hardly be expected to remember them all."

Ryan was excused.

A few more perfunctory witnesses were called, and the inquest was closed.

The verdict, not surprisingly, was "Death by misadventure."

Pons shot a glance at Ryan and Bannan, who sat with solemn faces. But the ghost of a smile shone through on each.

Then Pons pressed through the crowd to the street, where he sought and found Colonel and Mrs. Pomfroy.

"If you will be so good as to drive us to Pomfroy Chase, I may be able to throw a little light on the mystery," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Pons, if only you could!" cried our client.

"Let us just see," answered Pons.

"Come along then," urged Colonel Pomfroy. "The sooner we get to the bottom of this, the better. I've had my fill of 'death by misadventure.' "

Driving out of Cranborne, Pons said, "I submit that despite the verdict of the inquest both the visitors to Pomfroy Chase were done to death." He stopped Colonel Pomfroy's protest with an upraised hand and continued. "Quite possibly, it may be looked upon, in the circumstances, as committed in self-defence, but I rather think the courts would take a different view of the matter. It seems quite unlikely that any stranger could have blundered into the stallion's stall, and it is wholly incredible that a fox's line should have naturally led across a sleeping man. Both these men were carrying lethal weapons, and one had actually been used; I think it a mistake not to have searched for a bullet somewhere about the stables. But no matter. The verdict is in. If the first visitor was led to the stall and pushed in, it was done in all likelihood by more than one person; and no one person, it follows, could have arranged the death of that fellow behind the thicket. In the circumstances, it would be next to impossible to bring a conclusive action against anyone for either of those deaths. I am not sure that it would be desirable."

Colonel Pomfroy found his voice. "But the motive, Mr. Pons! What could the motive be?"

Our client intervened. "What Mr. Pons is saying is that the Hunt servants expected something more to happen. Something has happened. And they are still tense, still expectant. . . ."

"Good God!" cried Colonel Pomfroy. "You don't mean to suggest that there may be still others?"

"Not, I trust, at Pomfroy Chase," said Pons enigmatically.

We drove the rest of the way in silence.

Once at Pomfroy Chase, Pons descended from the car with alacrity. "Now, then, if you please, let us settle the matter."

He led the way around the house, past the stables, across the greensward and directly to Ryan's cottage, where he knocked peremptorily on the door.

It was opened by a woman in her middle thirties, blue-eyed and dark of hair.

"Mrs. Ryan?" asked Pons.

"Yes." Seeing Colonel and Mrs. Pomfroy, she nodded a little shyly at them.

"Mrs. Ryan, I would like a word with Mr. Ryan's father."

She gaped at Pons, but recovered her composure in a moment. "If you'll excuse me, I will see if he's awake."

She would have backed in, closing the door to us, but a voice from inside said, "Come in!"

"He heard," she said. "Please come in."

She stood aside, and we walked into the tidy living-room of the cottage.

There sat a slouch-hatted old man in an armchair. A shawl lay across his shoulders; he held it about him as if he were cold. His thick beard was streaked with grey, but, being relatively short, it gave him an appearance of grizzled roughness rather than of age. His narrowed eyes looked at us over spectacles.

"Mr. Ryan?" asked Pons again.

The old man nodded curtly.

Pons made as if to shake hands; instead, with a rapid movement, he tore the hat from the old man's head, revealing tousled black, ringleted hair beneath.

"Mrs. Pomfroy—Colonel Pomfroy," said Pons, "let me introduce you to Sean O'Leary, once known as the Black Prince of the Irish Republican Army, and, more recently, as Captain Dion Price, Joint-Master of your Hunt, and at least co-author of the death by misadventure of the two agents of that army sent to execute him for his treachery in saving Lady Cleve, after he had been found at last."

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Pomfroy.

Behind us Ryan and Bannan, followed by the Whips, crowded into the cottage and pressed around the Black Prince, sullenly defiant, to resist whatever might be threatening him.

"And those gentlemen, if I am not mistaken, are all that remain of the valiant little band that rescued Lady Cleve and caused them to be proscribed by the Irish rebels," continued Pons. "The Black Prince was under sentence of death—when he could be found. Here he and his band were as one and acted as one."

Captain Price found his voice. "I am sorry, Mrs. Pomfroy—Colonel Pomfroy—what this gentleman says is true." Then he looked squarely at Pons. "I am not sure what he proposes to do about it."

Pons smiled. "Gentlemen, the verdict is in. 'Death by misadventure.' I am not disposed to question what amounts to poetic justice. But you must know that your position here is untenable, that the

men who came to kill you will eventually be followed by others, that you cannot go on dealing death even to would-be murderers. You have no alternative but to lose yourselves again."

Captain Price sighed. "Thank you, sir." And once again, to Colonel Pomfroy and our client, he said simply, "I am sorry."

"It was evident that our client did not believe in the verdict of the inquest," explained Pons, as we drove toward London in one of Colonel Pomfroy's cars. "Accepting that disbelief, I found it intriguing to speculate on the motive anyone might have for beating someone into near-insensibility, and thrusting him into the stall of a horse that might be counted upon to kill him. Robbery was clearly not the motive. But the size of the sum of money the dead man carried immediately suggested blackmail, and the presence of the weapon suggested that he had come to commit a crime. Captain Price's waistcoat linked the two men. I immediately concluded that the dead man had had some design upon Captain Price, that the Joint-Master had attempted to buy him off, then had reason to think better of it, and, with the aid of the Hunt servants, arranged his death. That he did accept Price's money and then attempted to kill him, we now know. But the dead man's design had been large enough to make it seem advisable for Captain Price to disappear, which in turn suggested knowledge that the failure of the first man might bring a second, which accounted for the tension so patent to Mrs. Pomfroy.

"It was my brief and seemingly innocuous conversation with Ryan that brought to our notice two remarkable coincidences. The first was the fact that all the Hunt servants retained by Captain Price were Irish; this in itself was most singular, but most important, it suggested a motive out of the past. The second was the visit of Ryan's father, occurring almost simultaneously with Captain Price's disappearance. I was then virtually certain of Price's whereabouts, but before I could act, the second executioner sent from Ireland arrived and was dealt with by the Hunt servants, who managed to fill him with whisky—either by force or with his consent—and spirit him away to the copse—you will recall the absence of two of the Whips—where they placed him, well hidden, and either alive or dead—for he may well have been killed there by a weapon resembling a horse's hoof only a few minutes before the hunters arrived—led Ryan's tame fox to the place and away from it again, and made

certain that the hounds followed the false line so that another 'death by misadventure' could be staged.

"At that point, the fact that Lady Cleve knew Captain Price immediately suggested that Price might be the Black Prince, and this in turn made it certain that Price might be sought out by the Irish Republican Army for his treachery to their cause, and punished. Instead, the executioners were slain. I did what I could to put the coroner on the right track," he finished, "but I have no wish to interfere with the curious workings of justice."

## *The Adventure of the Amateur Philologist*

MY FRIEND, SOLAR PONS, and I were discussing the trial of the French mass murderer, Landru, one May evening, when the outer door to our quarters opened, and a ponderous step fell upon the stairs.

"Surely that can be no one but Inspector Jamison!" said Pons. "Perhaps he's bringing us some little problem too unimportant to engage the gentlemen at Scotland Yard."

"Elementary," I said. "It would be difficult to mistake Jamison's heavy tread."

"Would it not!" agreed my companion affably. "Or his knock."

The knock that fell upon the door was of such authority that one expected it to be followed by a demand that the door be opened in the name of the law.

"Come in, Inspector," called Pons.

Jamison thrust his portly figure into the room, his eyes quizzical, his round face touched by a light smile. "Good-evening," he said amiably. "I'm surprised to find you at home."

"Ah, we are sometimes here, Parker and I," said Pons. "No young lady is demanding Parker's services, and nothing of a criminous nature has engaged my interest in the past day or two. Come, sit down, Inspector."

Jamison removed his bowler and overcoat, put them down on a chair, and came over to stand next to the mantel, near to which Pons and I were sitting.

"I take it this isn't a social call, Jamison," said Pons.

Jamison smiled. "Well, you might say it is and you might say it isn't. We're not exactly befuddled at the Yard, and we'll have the fellow who killed Max Markheim within twenty-four hours. But you're right, Pons, there's a bit of a puzzle troubling me. Ever hear of a man named Abraham Aubrey?"

"The name isn't entirely unfamiliar," said Pons thoughtfully. "He is the author of some trifling pieces on philological matters."

"That's the fellow. Has a place in Stepney—private house. Sells antiques and such. Dabbles in linguistics and philology. About

fifty-five. One of our men reported that a thief he was watching went into his place of business. After reading his report, we decided to go around and pay Aubrey a visit. We got there just as he was having a heart attack. We took him to a hospital. He's bad. Couldn't answer questions. One curious thing. He'd evidently just opened his mail, and he still had a letter clutched in his hand. We can't make head or tail of it."

"You've brought it?"

Jamison took a plain envelope from his pocket and handed it to Pons. "I don't know that it had anything to do with his heart attack. Very likely not. We thought it might be in code and our cipher people have had a go at it. Made nothing out of it. Doesn't seem to be any code we know, or any sort of cipher. Since I had to be in the vicinity this evening, I thought I'd just bring it along and show it to you. I know your interest in oddments of this sort."

Pons had taken from the envelope a folded piece of lined paper which still bore the creases of having been crushed in Aubrey's hand. His eyes lit, flickering over the message scrawled there; he looked up.

"It seems clearly an adjuration to Aubrey," he said, his lips trembling with withheld laughter.

"Aha, but what?" cried Jamison.

Pons handed the message to me. "Read it slowly aloud, Parker."

"'Aubrey, thou fribbling dotard, get thee to thy pinquid pightle to dabble and stolch about next rodome! tosy in dark. And 'ware the horrid hent!' — There's no signature."

"Aubrey must have known who wrote it," said Jamison. "And he must have known what it meant."

"I daresay he did — but it's hardly enough of a message to bring on a heart attack," said Pons dryly. "I have no doubt you already noticed that the paper is of the most common kind. . . ."

"Of course."

"And precisely, too, that kind of paper issued to those unfortunates detained at His Majesty's pleasure."

Jamison nodded curtly. "The question is — what's it mean?"

"I daresay I'll have the answer to that in a few days," said Pons crisply. "If you want it. Parker, be a good fellow, and copy this message."

I took the letter to the table and set to work copying it.

"There's no date on the letter; nothing to show when it was written," Jamison grumbled.



"But you found its envelope—which was not that in which you brought it. When and where was it posted?"

"Three days ago at Princetown, Devonshire."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Now, then—Aubrey owns some property in the country. Do you know where it is?"

Jamison flashed a glance of momentary annoyance at Pons. "I don't know how you do these things, Pons. Hardly a minute ago you knew only that Aubrey wrote some philological papers—now you know he owns property in the country."

"Ah, I submit that is, as Parker would say, elementary. You know where it is. Come, Jamison, don't waste time."

"He has about fifty acres near Stow—that's the Stow in Lincolnshire, near Stow Park, not far from Lincoln." He grimaced. "I know that country well. We were all through it with a fine-toothed comb looking for Lady Canevin's jewels—ten thousand pounds gone!"

"Ah, the cat burglaries. Let me see—that would be seven years ago. You took in Archie Prior for that series of burglaries."

Jamison nodded. "And we're reasonably certain he took Lady Canevin's jewels, too—we were hot on his heels that night, but he slipped away from us—took to the fields when we had the roads watched. We caught him in the Colby house in Lincoln next day—we had his prints on a little job he'd done a week before. He got eight years. We never recovered more of the stuff than he had on him or on his premises in London. And precious little that was."

Pons nodded thoughtfully. He sat for a few moments with eyes closed, his long lean fingers tented before him.

I finished copying the letter sent to Aubrey and gave the original back to Jamison.

Pons opened his eyes. "Tell me about Aubrey. Is he tall, fat, short?"

Jamison shrugged. "Average. About your height. A bit heavier. Lean-faced, too, though he wears a full beard."

"Capital!" cried Pons, his austere face becoming suddenly animated. "He lived alone?"

The Inspector nodded. "I suspect we saved his life, coming when we did."

"Then you have access to his premises?"

"We locked the house after him."

"Pray send around the key, Jamison. And a likeness of Aubrey. I expect to take possession during the night. I fancy there is little

time to lose. Give me three days. At the end of that time, I submit it may be well worth your while to conduct a careful search of the premises."

Jamison stared at him for a few moments. Then, choking back the questions in his throat, he nodded. "I'll have the key here in an hour—and a photograph of Aubrey. Though I may regret it!"

He clapped his bowler to his head, shrugged into his coat, and bade us good-evening.

"I must confess," I said, "I made little sense out of that letter."

"Tut, tut! The message was plain as a pikestaff to anyone but those who looked for riddles in it," said Pons. "Its author stirs my admiration and fires my interest. And so, too, does Mr. Abraham Aubrey. I trust he will recover, though his heart attack would seem to be fortuitous for our little inquiry."

"It is certainly too much of a coincidence that he should have a heart attack on reading that message," I said.

"Ah, not on reading it so much as its receipt at all. There is no signature, as you've seen. Yet I submit that Aubrey knew at once who had sent it to him. He had not expected to hear from that source, I'll wager. Let me call to your attention the fact that the letter was sent from Princetown, which is the site of Dartmoor."

"It came from someone in prison?"

"I should think that a sound deduction," said Pons.

"But its meaning—if it has any—escapes me."

"I daresay. It is one that a philologist might especially appreciate." He smiled. "But quite apart from its meaning, I submit it conveys certain facts. The writer, if not interested in linguistics or philology himself, has at least been intimately enough associated with Aubrey to have assimilated a ready familiarity with the subject. Presumably that association was broken. By what else if not the jailing of the writer? Quite possibly also there had developed a rift between the two, which might account for Aubrey's shock at receiving this directive in the mail. These facts, slender as they are, arouse some interesting speculations about the precise nature of the association between Abraham Aubrey, antique dealer and amateur philologist, and an unknown prisoner who is almost certainly being detained at His Majesty's pleasure." He shrugged. "But let us speculate no more. We shall explore the problem all in good time."

True to his word, Inspector Jamison sent around the key to the Stepney house of Abraham Aubrey, and a photograph of the man

himself—evidently one newly taken by someone at Scotland Yard, for it revealed Aubrey lying in his hospital bed. At once upon their arrival, Pons sprang into action. He retired to his chamber, and in less than half an hour emerged, wearing a beard, bushy eyebrows, and sideboards making him resemble Aubrey.

"Come along, Parker. The game's afoot. Mr. Abraham Aubrey is going home."

"Pons! You can't mean simply to walk into the man's home and take possession!" I protested.

"Ah, Parker, you have an uncanny faculty for reading my intentions," said Pons. "Perhaps you'd rather keep the peace at Number 7B?"

"Where is the place?" I asked, ignoring his thrust.

"In Alderney Road," he replied, consulting the tag affixed to the key.

"Stepney seems an unlikely setting for an antique shop."

"It may have certain advantages. It's frequented by seamen, and the sea is the source of many curios which could be profitably turned over by a dealer. If Aubrey is served there by a host of acquisitive seamen, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that he found the means to turn a handsome profit on items about which no one was likely to ask embarrassing questions. But, come—we'll go there openly. I hope—nay, I expect to be seen."

We took the underground at Paddington, and went by the Inner Circle to Aldgate, where we changed on to the District Line for Stepney Green. The Alderney Road address was within easy walking distance of the station, and we set out for it on foot, through dubious streets, frequently ill-lighted, and haunted by as diverse a variety of human beings as are to be found anywhere in London.

The house, when at last we came to it, was ordinary, neither as shabby as some of the neighbouring dwellings, nor as prepossessing as it might have been. In the feebly lit darkness, an air of secrecy shrouded it, given emphasis by shuttered windows. Pons went briskly up to the little entrance porch, took out the key Jamison had sent to our quarters, and let himself in. He found a light-switch and turned it on.

The soft lamplight illumined another world—one of artifacts and curios, antique furniture, glassware, carvings—all set about on shelves, tables, on the floor among the ordinary furniture of Aubrey's daily use—a fantastically apportioned room which lay beyond a small vestibule, from which a narrow stairs led up to

another storey under the gables. Books, art treasures, handicraft—all wearing an aura of rarity—took on separate life in the dimly lit room.

"Aubrey must be a wealthy man," I said.

"If wealth can be counted in possessions, yes," said Pons. "But for the moment I don't propose to make an inventory. We shall need to find a place to spend the night."

"Surely not here!" I cried.

"Where else? The role demands it," retorted Pons, chuckling.

A cursory exploration of the house revealed a bedroom upstairs, and a small alcove on the ground floor which had obviously served as Aubrey's bedroom; it contained a divan with bedding piled at the foot and was as orderly as the rest of the house was disorderly.

"This ought to make a comfortable bed for you, Parker. We've slept in our clothes before this," said Pons.

"What about you?"

"I'll take that easy-chair in the central room."

"Pons, you're expecting visitors?"

"I doubt it, at this point. Let us just see what tomorrow's adventure will bring."

So saying, he left me to the alcove. Lying on the settee there, trying to relax, I heard Pons moving about for some time, upstairs and down; he was still at it, pulling open drawers, opening and closing cabinet doors, when at last I drifted off into an uncertain sleep.

Daylight made a kind of iridescence in the shuttered house when Pons woke me. "We have just time to find a trifle of food for breakfast, and get over to King's Cross for the train to Lincoln," he said.

I swung my feet to the floor and saw that he carried a stout sack, which hung from his hand laden with some heavy objects, but I forebore to ask what he carried, knowing his habit of putting me off, but the shape of the objects suggested metal of some kind.

We made a conspicuous exit from the house by the way we had entered it. Pons seemed to be in no haste to leave the porch, and when at last he sauntered out into the street, he stood for a few moments looking up and down, as if proud of his disguise, confirming my previous opinion that my companion took a singular if somewhat juvenile pleasure in disguising himself, which evidently fed upon a flair for the dramatic integral to his nature.

"I could sound a whistle to draw attention to us," I said dryly.

"Let us be seen, by all means, but not, thank you, by means of whistle or klaxon," said Pons.

So saying, we set off down the street.

Mid-morning found us on the train for the three-hour journey to Lincoln by way of Grantham.

"I heard you hunting about last night," I said, once we were moving through the countryside north of London. "What were you searching for?"

"Certain articles I thought I might need on today's journey," he answered. "In the course of my looking around, however, I learned that Aubrey was born in Stow, and came to London from there. Presumably the farm he owns near Stow was his birthplace, and came down to him from his parents." His eyes twinkled. "If one can judge by the variety of his pieces, Aubrey is a man of parts."

He was not disposed to tell me more.

At Lincoln, three hours later, we changed to the Doncaster line for the brief journey to Stow Park, and there left the train for a walk of almost two miles to the hamlet of Stow.

The countryside was at its peak of green, and many blossoms shone in hedges and gardens. Chaffinches and larks sang, and the morning's mists had risen before the sun bright in heaven. In shadowed places, dew still gleamed on blade and leaf, and over the entire landscape lay a kind of shimmering pale green glow. Pons, I observed, walked without haste; the hour was now high noon, for the journey from Doncaster had taken only twenty minutes; he said little, save for making a momentary reference to the old Norman church at Stow; which lay just ahead. "A pity we hardly dare take the time to examine it," he said. "We can hardly be back in Lincoln for the 2:10, but we might make it in time for the 4:40. The last train leaves after six."

Not far past the church, Pons turned down a lane and came to a stop before a two-storey farm-house, set before a small group of outbuildings. He stood for a few moments surveying the scene.

"I fancy the area we want is well beyond those buildings, which will screen us from view," he said presently. "Aubrey evidently has a tenant on his farm. Come, we'll make a little circuit."

He walked on past the farm buildings.

"What are we looking for?" I asked finally.

"For a small pond or brook near to which we're likely to find a bower of roses and some beehives—all set in the middle of a pasture

or small field. Pasture, I think we'll find it." He gestured to our left. "And there, I daresay, is our pond."

He turned from the lane as he spoke.

Before us now lay a little pasture, not quite in the middle of which stood a grove of four trees, a bower of bushes, and the round tops of what must have been beehives. Since the ground there fell away into a little swale, it was not unlikely that a pond lay in that spot, particularly since a slender brook could be seen meandering away in the distance ahead.

We were not long in reaching the place, and there, just as Pons had foreseen, we saw that the bushes were indeed rosebushes, crowding upon a quintet of beehives. Pons put down the sack he carried and stood for a moment, briskly rubbing his hands together, his eyes twinkling.

"This, Parker, is a 'pightle' of land—or a 'pickel' or 'piddle' if you will have it so, of pasture land, moreover, or 'pinguid' land—a 'pinguid pightle,'" he said. "English is a noble, expressive language. A pity so many of its fine words have been relegated to oblivion."

"Capitall" I said, not without an edge to my voice. "And what, pray tell, led you to hives and rosebushes?"

"Another of those fine old words, my dear fellow—'rodomel.' This means, if I recall correctly, a mixture of honey and the juice of rose-leaves—a poet's word. Or a philologist's. I have no doubt Aubrey apprehended instantly what it might mean." He bent to the sack. "Now let us just dabble and stolch about a little. That would be, I fear, in that muddy area between the water's edge and the grass."

He took from the bag first a pair of calf-height boots. Taking off his shoes, he put them on. Then he removed from the bag the joints of a rod, which he proceeded to fit together.

"I take it," I said, watching him, "that 'stolch' means to walk about in mud or quagmire."

"Excellent, Parker. But we shall do a bit more than that."

He strode forward into the muck and began to probe it with the rod, which went down in some places for two feet. He kept at this for perhaps ten minutes before the rod struck something. He left it standing in the mud, and returned to the sack for a jointed shovel, with which he began to dig at the spot.

"Keep an eye open for strangers," said Pons.

"There's a farmer in the field across the lane back there."

"A local. We were observed both coming to Aubrey's house last night and leaving it this morning. We were also followed to King's Cross."

"I saw no one."

"Because you weren't looking for someone. I was. He gave up at King's Cross. I rather fancy he's back in Alderney Road with an eye on Aubrey's house."

He was digging as he spoke. Now he gave a curt exclamation of satisfaction, and with great care shoveled around the object in the muck before he dug under it and brought it up on the shovel. It appeared to be a bundle of leather, which had suffered some deterioration because of its immersion in the damp ground.

Pons carried it around to where the sack lay and deposited it carefully beside it, a broad smile on his face. Then he went around the muck to where the pond abutted upon a little bank; there he washed the shovel, the rod, and, after removing them, the boots. Only after he had finished with this task, and returned all the articles to the sack, did he carefully unfold the leather.

There lay revealed a sadly tarnished silver casket.

"Let me introduce you to Lady Canevin's jewel box, Parker," said Pons. "Somewhat the worse for circumstances, but with its contents, I am certain, untouched, just where Archie Prior hid it before he was taken."

He wrapped it carefully once more and thrust it, dirty as it was, into the sack on top of the paraphernalia he had brought with him.

"Now to get back to Aubrey's premises," he said. "We'll stop only long enough in Lincoln to send Jamison a wire."

We reached the house in Alderney Road in mid-evening.

On the porch Pons paused and said, without turning his head, "A little man is walking down the other side of the street, Parker. I daresay we'll see more of him before very long."

Pons let us into the house.

"About time you came." Inspector Jamison's voice came to meet us out of the dusk inside.

"I trust you got in without being observed," said Pons.

"Came in from the rear, as you suggested," said Jamison. "Now, what's this?"

Pons dropped the sack he carried, opened it, and reached in for the leather-wound casket. He handed it to Jamison.

Jamison reached for it, then drew his hand back. "It's dirty!"

"What else could you expect, being buried for seven years?" asked Pons. He put it down on a sideboard against one wall and unwrapped it carefully. "Handle it with care, Jamison. There may still be prints on it. Unless I am very much mistaken, this is Lady Canevin's jewel casket."

An exclamation escaped Jamison.

"Buried where Archie Prior told Aubrey he'd put it," Pons went on. He took out his watch. "Nine forty-five," he murmured, looking up. "Are the police standing by?"

Jamison nodded curtly.

"Good. We may expect that an attempt will be made to collect the jewel case tonight. The house has been under observation ever since we first reached it yesterday. 'Ware the horrid hent' means nothing less than that the jewel box, once recovered and brought here by someone not likely to be under police surveillance, will be lifted - 'hent' - by dark or night - 'horrid.' "

"You broke the code!" cried Jamison.

"There was no code, but more of that later. For the nonce, let us just put out the light and wait upon events, without talking. We ought to be somewhat concealed. There's a spot under the shelving over there, and one of us can be concealed on the far side of the sideboard, and yet another behind the couch in the alcove."

Pons put out the lamp and we took our positions.

There began an interminable wait, which, to judge by his frequent movements, was most trying for Jamison, whose bulk made crouching stance difficult to maintain for any length of time. The room gradually came back to life—objects took on a shadowy existence in the wan light that filtered in from outside. Clocks ticked, at least half a dozen of them from Aubrey's collection of antique timepieces, and an overpowering, occasionally musky atmosphere of very old things became manifest. Not a sound escaped Pons, and I held myself far quieter than I had thought I might.

It was after midnight when the sound of glass being cut fell to ear. Evidently our nocturnal visitor cut out a piece only large enough to enable him to slip his hand in and unlatch a window, for presently there came a sound of a window being cautiously raised. Then, after a few moments of silence, a thin beam of light invaded the room, flickering rapidly from one place to another, and coming to rest at last on the silver casket.

The beam converged upon the casket as our visitor closed in



upon it. Just as he put forth a hand to seize it, Pons's hand closed like a vice on his wrist. At the same moment I turned on the light.

"Goldie Evers," said Pons. "Not long out of Dartmoor."

"And aching to go back," said Jamison, coming out of his hiding place.

Goldie Evers, a slight, short man, with very blond hair, was literally paralyzed with surprise. "I ain't done nothing," he said at last.

"Breaking and entering," said Jamison. "That's enough to begin on."

He went into the adjoining room to the open window and blew his police whistle.

"We'll need that key, Pons," he said, "so the window can be repaired and the house locked up again—until we have time to make an inventory here."

"You'll find, I think, that Aubrey has been serving as a fence for stolen goods for a long time," said Pons.

Jamison's constables came in by way of the front door, which had not been locked.

"Here he is, boys," said the Inspector. "Take him to the station, and take that silver casket along. Wrap it carefully, and take care not to touch it. Come along, Pons—we'll take a police car back to Number 7B."

"There was very little mystery to the problem," Pons said, on the way back to our quarters, "though Archie Prior's note delighted me for its use of so many long-forgotten English words. Your code men were looking far deeper than they need have looked, for the message was plain. Can you repeat it, Parker?"

"'Aubrey, thou fribbling dotard, get thee to thy pinquid pightle to dabble and stolch about next rodomet tosy in dark. And 'ware the horrid hent,' " I repeated.

"Capital!" cried Pons. "Well, now, let us look at it in the light Aubrey was expected to read it, with his knowledge of the language. The adjuration is perfectly plain to anyone versed in philological matters. 'Thou fribbling dotard' is of no consequence—it means only 'you trifling old man'—and is not related to the direct message, which instructs Aubrey to go to his plot of pastureland—'pinquid pightle' and look around in the mud next to bees and wild roses—the 'rodomet' of the message, where he might expect to find something 'tosy in dark'—or snugly hidden in a safe, dark place—

obviously in the ground before the beehives, which was just where we found it. Finally, of course, Aubrey is told that the casket, once retrieved, would be taken in the night. Presumably Aubrey would in some way be repaid for his services, though Prior makes no assurance of it.

"Now, then, obviously Prior, if released, will be kept under observation for some time. He cannot go to Lincolnshire, without immediately tipping his hand. Nor can someone who, like Goldie Evers, had been confided in, for he might also be watched."

"He wasn't being watched," growled Jamison.

"No matter. When you were hot on Archie's heels, he had to hide the Canevin jewels. Since he was near Aubrey's land, of which he knew, he managed to bury them there. He very likely did not know the extent of your evidence against him when you took him at the Colby house, for he certainly contemplated retrieving Lady Canevin's jewel casket long before this. He finally hit upon the ingeniously worded message we have seen, and probably smuggled it out of Dartmoor with Goldie Evers."

He chuckled. "He'll be a long time enjoying the fruits of his ingenious labours—and I daresay, Aubrey, if he recovers, will have ample time to perfect his knowledge of philology."

## *The Adventure of the Seven Sisters*

WHENEVER INSPECTOR Seymour Jamison was annoyed by my friend Solar Pons's obvious deductive skill, in the earlier years before he was ready to acknowledge that skill without reservation, he made some sly reference to the complex circumstances surrounding the death of Lionel Ruthel, a crime which remains officially unsolved in the annals of Scotland Yard. Presumably, since Jamison had once pointed to the case as Pons's "greatest failure," this unsubtle reference was intended to unsettle him. Pons, however, took a different view of that singular matter, and with reason; he invariably maintained an inscrutable silence, wearing a tolerant smile, which nettled Jamison. But the affair had more ramifications than the Inspector knew.

It began one autumn afternoon not long after Pons's successful solution of the adventure of the Obrisset Snuff-box. I had come into our quarters to find Pons pasting cuttings into his scrapbook of criminal events. As I divested myself of hat and ulster, Pons sat back with a report in his hand, an expression of bemusement on his lean, hawk-like face.

"Now here is a curious matter, Parker," he observed. "'Murder on the Underground,' " he read. "But see for yourself."

He handed the extract to me.

I found it to be nothing more uncommon than an account of the strangling of an as yet unidentified man whose body had been discovered in a compartment of the Underground at the Willesden Green Station the previous night.

"I see nothing unusual in this," I said, handing it back.

"'Garroted,' " he said. "A point seems to have been made of that. In itself, perhaps it is not curious. I seem to remember, however, that this is the third garroting in London within the past seven or eight months."

"That may put a different face on the matter," I conceded.

"Does it not!" He smiled. "I should not be surprised if the case is brought to my attention before very many hours have passed."

So saying, he reached into the pocket of his mouse-coloured dressing-gown and thrust at me a piece of obviously expensive

notepaper, across the top of which, once unfolded, I read the name Norris Ruthel, and below it, "Lord Warden of the Pontine Marshes."

"Dear Mr. Pons," I read, "I trust it will be convenient for you to see me this afternoon at four, regarding the death of my brother. If you have not sent word by two o'clock to deny me this privilege, I will take the liberty of presenting myself at the hour named." Message and signature were in a crowded, if legible, script, each letter pressing close upon the other. I looked up. "It came by messenger?"

Pons nodded. "Not long after you stepped out this morning. What do you make of it?"

"Other than the manifest conclusions to be drawn from embossed rag paper," I said, "it is surely highly ambiguous."

"He may assume that I know about his brother's death."

"Do you?"

"There is no mention of it in the press at this moment," replied Pons, "but I've not seen the afternoon papers. Lionel Ruthel—presumably the brother to whom he has reference, for I find no other Ruthel on the telephone—was a wealthy art collector living in the West End. Unmarried, reclusive. His specialties lay in the domain of ancient African and Chinese art."

"And you think his the body on the Underground?"

"I daresay it is likely. The victims of the past week's other capital crimes have been identified."

"And our client? Where are the Pontine Marshes?"

"Oh, come, come, Parker."

"Not Italy?"

"Why not? I submit that Mr. Norris Ruthel may well have been until recently one of the numerous British expatriates belonging to the English colony in Rome. That appellation may be only a fanciful affectation. However, he writes a good clear hand—nothing affected about it, and keeps a precise, even line. I look forward to his visit."

"Ah, but if he has but recently come back to England, his brother's death may have taken place years ago."

"That is a *non sequitur*, Parker," said Pons sharply. "You know my interest in the criminal activities in Britain, and you have seen my files many times. There is no Ruthel murder in that compilation."

So saying, he resumed the filing of his cuttings.

Promptly at four a motor drew up at the kerb and discharged our client, who was preceded to the door of our quarters by Mrs. Johnson, who brought up his card. Like his notepaper, it too was embossed. Our client himself followed hard upon her announcement and came into our quarters past Mrs. Johnson, diffident almost to the point of apology for having invaded Pons's domain. He was a slender man of middle age, thin of face, with an air of inquiry in his pale blue eyes. His long fingers fondled a cane crowned by an ivory head, and he was impeccably dressed, with that taste which conceals the costliness of clothing and yet permits its quality to show.

He took a seat at Pons's invitation and waited on Pons to open their dialogue.

"I take it, Mr. Ruthel, that your brother's was the body found last night on the Underground."

"Yes, Mr. Pons. My brother, though a wealthy man, was somewhat eccentric and parsimonious; he chose to use the Underground rather than his car. Quite naturally, when I learned of his death, I assumed—very probably like the police—that its motive was robbery. I am no longer so certain of that. I began to go through his things this morning—I should say, Mr. Pons, that I've been all over the world in the past twenty years, and never once back in England in all that time; so, actually, I know very little about Lionel's life during that period, save only what he chose to write to me—and he wrote sparingly—or what I read in the papers of his purchases at some auction at Sotheby's or elsewhere—and I found something very puzzling. I am frank to say, Mr. Pons, it unsettled me."

He handed Pons a purple envelope. "This was stuck away in a locked desk drawer. It came from Marrakesch—that is, the first one did, since that is its envelope."

Pons drew from it two fragile pages of purple stationery. I went around to look over his shoulder.

The messages on the pages bore no superscription of any kind. Each was brutally terse. The first read: "Ten thousand pounds. In currency P.O. Box 8, West Central Post Office. Addressee, Mr. Simon Fance will call. You have thirty days. Remember Elena." The second was almost precisely similar, except that the name "Elena" had given way to "Jasmine." Each was signed with a curious little cluster of what appeared to be asterisks. Neither was typewritten and, curiously, each was in calligraphy; the asterisks were

clearly brushed in with singular delicacy. Glancing at Pons, I saw that his eyes were aglow with interest.

"Scented, I observe," he said. "Very probably these came at different times, though your brother preserved but one of the envelopes. A pity."

"I suppose that is the case," said our client.

"The obvious course would be to examine his accounts."

"I have done so, Mr. Pons. I found that ten thousand pounds had been withdrawn on June the second. I could find no record that a second such sum had been withdrawn. I could not but conclude that Lionel must have died after failing to submit to this second threat. For it is a threat, is it not?"

Pons nodded.

"And not reported to the police," Mr. Ruthel went on. "That is certainly most odd. I can only surmise that there must have been a very strong reason why Lionel should have wanted to avoid their existence. I do understand that collectors are sometimes tempted to use unorthodox methods in pursuit of their enthusiasms—but frankly, if I may say so, this matter would seem to have something to do with the fair sex."

Pons was noncommittal.

"And what passes for signature—those asterisks. . . ."

"Stars, I submit, Mr. Ruthel," said Pons reflectively.

"I can make nothing of it—nothing," said our client, throwing up his hands. "I trust you will be able to do so, Mr. Pons."

"I will look into it, Mr. Ruthel."

Our client promptly came to his feet. Still, he hesitated for a moment. "Ought I turn these messages over to the police?"

"I will undertake that task, all in good time," said Pons. "You may expect to hear from me."

"I am at my brother's home," said Ruthel. "I have no residence of my own in London, and have been with him for the past month."

"Did he seem to you in any way disturbed during that time?" asked Pons then.

"I couldn't say so, no. Preoccupied, perhaps. To tell the truth, Mr. Pons, there was no very great communication between us. He never mentioned these messages, and he certainly didn't seem worried about them. Indeed, the only event to quicken his interest was an auction at Sotheby's, offering a Ming piece he hoped to add to his collection."

"Were you ever in Burma, Mr. Ruthel?"

If our client was startled at Pons's abrupt change of subject, he concealed it well. "It is strange you should ask, sir. I spent six months of this year in Rangoon."

"Thank you, Mr. Ruthel. Pray wait upon word from me."

Our client bade us a formal good-bye and took his leave.

Pons immediately handed to me the notes received by Lionel Ruthel. "What do you make of these, Parker?"

"Well, for one thing, there is a sort of Oriental air about them," I said.

"Capital!" cried Pons. "But why do you say so?"

"They are perfumed."

"Ah, do you think that scent perfume? Try again."

I raised one of the sheets to my nostrils. There was no mistaking its fragrance. "It's sandalwood," I said.

"I cannot recall in all my experience another blackmail letter so fragrant," Pons said, chuckling. "But it is surely incense, rather than perfume."

"Of course!" I agreed. "That but underscores its Oriental flavour. Add to it the calligraphy, the texture of the paper which is certainly like that light paper used for the making of prints in Japan and China."

"What do you make of the signature?"

"Brushed in, plainly."

"Elementary," he said impatiently.

"A pattern of asterisks against what appears to be a darker background," I reflected. "I cannot imagine what they stand for."

"Do you make them asterisks?" Pons asked, with that annoying air of knowing very well what they were, and patiently waiting for me to discover their identity.

"They are certainly asterisks," I said stoutly.

"Very well, then. I concede that they look like asterisks. Their pattern suggests nothing to you?"

I looked at them again and shook my head.

"Oh, come, Parker—the washed-in background is distinctive."

"Ah, they're meant to be stars," I interrupted. "But why precisely seven?"

"I submit that the exact number which occurs on both notes signifies the involvement of seven women in the matter."

"My word, Pons! How can you say so? Why not men?"

"These seven stars appear to be similarly grouped in each case, do they not?"

"Yes. Almost like a distorted figure."

"If indeed they represent stars, does nothing further follow for you?"

I shook my head, I fear, impatiently, well aware of Pons's little game.

"But perhaps astronomy was not one of your studies, Parker. Surely you must remember something of Greek mythology."

"I have learned more of myths of various kinds since I took up quarters here than I ever knew before," I retorted.

"A distinct touch, Parker!" said Pons, smiling. "Atlas and Pleione had seven daughters—Alcyone, Asterope, Electra, Kelaine, Maia, Merope, and Taygete—all of whom were translated into the heavens as stars by Zeus, supposedly to escape the amorous designs of the hunter, Orion, who with his dog, also became stars. They are to be found in the constellation Taurus, appearing in the autumn and setting again in spring. They have been estimated at a hundred parsecs from our own planet and appear as a little cloud of luminosity in the winter sky—six of them are clear enough to the eye; the seventh—presumably Electra mourning for Troy—is always dim, sometimes invisible. Of them Alcyone is the brightest. They do indeed appear to the eye in the shape of a crude dipper, clustered closely together, and thus tiny by comparison with Ursa Major, commonly known as the 'big dipper.' I submit, therefore, that seven women are allied in this matter."

"Sisters?"

"I should be inclined to doubt it. Very probably they are simply banded together in this common aim."

"That is surely unique in the annals of blackmail. What would be their motive?"

"Whatever it is, their names must have had some significance to Ruthel. The evidence is that he paid the first levy made on him without any obvious attempt to avoid doing so. There is nothing in either note to suggest why the demand was made—except a woman's given name. This must then have been of immediate significance to him—and of such meaning that he was impelled to pay without question."

"But he balked at the second."

"Evidently." Pons's eyes danced. "I cannot remember when such a curious combination of challenging facts has been laid before me."

At this point, unhappily, I was called to attend a patient. I left Pons sitting at the cluttered table, caressing the lobe of one ear in



that familiar attitude of contemplation, the late Lionel Ruthel's scented notes under his eye.

When I returned two hours later, I found Pons once again at work on his scrapbooks—but now poring over them, rather than arranging his cuttings. He looked up at my entrance.

"I am sorry to see by your revealing expression that your patient is in a bad way," he said.

"He is recovering from an apoplectic seizure, but his condition is not good and the prognosis not promising," I replied. "And what progress are you making in the case?"

"I have not been idle," he said, waving one hand toward the columns laid before him.

I leaned over and glanced at the extracts. "What possible clues can you find applicable to Ruthel's murder in papers dated four and five years ago?"

He answered by tapping one of the reports pasted into the scrapbook under my eye. It was a mere paragraph setting forth the fact that the police confessed themselves baffled by the disappearance of a young lady, Miss Elena Brown.

"I have also found a Miss Jasmine Struthers, similarly vanished, without any record of her reappearance. Surely it is more than a coincidence that two young women, among the many who disappear every year, seldom to be seen again, should bear such comparatively uncommon names as 'Elena' and 'Jasmine'?"

"Ah, I see," I said. "They were murdered and someone has traced the crime to Ruthel. That would account for his paying the first blackmail levied upon him with such speed."

"That is certainly possible," agreed Pons, though with a manifest lack of enthusiasm. "However, I could find no evidence that their bodies have been recovered. That seems to me significant. Both young women appear to have had difficulties at home. One vanished without any trace. The other—Miss Jasmine Struthers—confided to a companion that she was off to Paris to meet a friend. Neither was ever seen again. Of course, there are scores of similar cases recorded annually, and I may be being led astray—but the coincidence cannot be overlooked."

"What other motive—if not the threat to disclose murder—could have prompted such swift payment from Ruthel?"

"That remains to be disclosed. You will recall my reference to the other two men who were murdered in similar fashion—Henry

Bresham and George Stoner. I have looked back into accounts of these crimes in my files. Both were murdered at night, one on the street, one in his home. Both were wealthy men. And in the accounts that dealt with Stoner, mention was made of Stoner's one-time association with the ownership and management of a rather extensive importing business, conducted under the heading of 'Ruthel's, Inc.' This was sold four years ago. That the method of death should have been precisely the same is unmistakably significant, particularly in view of the character of the warnings sent."

"Why?"

"It suggests nothing to you?"

"Except that the same agent must have been behind each."

"You may have struck closer to the central point than you know,"

Pons said, with an enigmatic smile. "Nothing more?"

I shook my head testily. "If there is something other to be observed, I fail to see it."

"I submit that both warnings and method of murder are distinctly Oriental."

"But both of the women—if indeed you have established a connection between them and the references in the notes—were English."

Pons raised his eyebrows. "You are convinced they are dead, then?"

"Well," I said doggedly, "there is no stronger motive than the threat of exposure of murder. Moreover, the warnings sent to Ruthel were certainly not written by them."

"Calligraphy is predominantly an Oriental art," agreed Pons.

"Oh, yes, but one of the women—you hold for seven—might have learned the art," I protested.

"And presumably also the skill required in garroting. One of them must then be of exceptional strength."

"It is not impossible."

"A skill much practised in Asia, in such countries as Burma and Indo-China. The only source we know for the warnings, however, is Marrakesch."

"It is certainly a mixed bag of facts," I said.

"Is it not!" cried Pons with manifest delight. "And we shall hear more of them in a matter of minutes, for if I am not mistaken, the street door has just opened and closed. It is no doubt Inspector Jamison. I asked him to step around if time permitted—and, as usual, his curiosity has impelled him here without delay."

Inspector Jamison's heavy tread on the stairs was indeed audible as Pons spoke. In a brief space, he tapped on our door, then opened it to permit his portly body entry into our quarters.

"What is it this time, Pons?" asked the Inspector, looking at Pons suspiciously, his face somewhat flushed from the effort of climbing the stairs.

"Pray sit down, Inspector. A little problem has come to my attention and I need your help."

"A bit of a turn, that," said Jamison as he took off his bowler and laid it on the table. He sat down, smiling. "The Yard does have its uses, eh, Pons?"

"Indeed it does," Pons agreed.

"What is it, then?"

"Last night the body of Lionel Ruthel was discovered on the Underground at Willesden Green. Garroted."

Jamison nodded. "Spilsbury's examined the body. In his opinion Ruthel was strangled with a braided leather thong."

Pons considered this information thoughtfully. "In April, Henry Bresham was killed. In July, George Stoner. Both garroted." Hard on Jamison's brusque nod, he added, "Motive?"

"We've not uncovered any. It wasn't robbery, as far as we know—in any of these three murders. If there is any connection among these men, we've not come upon it yet, though they knew one another. Stoner was a partner in Ruthel's, an importing business that sold out four years ago. Both Stoner and Ruthel belonged to a social club—'Hunters & Anglers'—but seldom attended."

"Was there ever made to the police by any one of these victims any complaint of blackmail?" asked Pons then.

Jamison's eyes narrowed. "What are you getting at?"

Pons leaned forward and tapped the notes Ruthel had received.

Jamison picked them up.

"Lionel Ruthel received these prior to his death. You'll note the date on the envelope. He paid the first demand. He failed to pay the second. He died. Presumably, since he had thirty days, the demand was made at least a month ago."

"Marrakesch," mused Jamison.

"The Yard can institute inquiries there," said Pons. "It would be interesting to learn whether Bresham and Stoner withdrew any substantial sums of money at any time during the past year."

"If they received any demands like these, we found no trace of them."

"Destroyed, no doubt."

"I'll have to take these, Pons," said Jamison.

"I have no further need of them. You'll have noticed their Oriental character. Further to this matter—it might be instructive to look into the disappearance of two young ladies—Miss Elena Brown of Fulham, and Miss Jasmine Struthers of South Norwood. I have the newspaper accounts; there may be further details in your files. I've come upon no continuing reference to either girl. No word of bodies. Nothing. I put it to you, Jamison, that there is surely some connection between these missing girls and the garrotings."

"Possibly," agreed the Inspector. "There could be a connection. But bodies aren't always discovered, you know."

"That's what I pointed out," I put in. "Somebody knows—or found out. That would be motive enough for no one's complaining of blackmail."

"I submit that the character of the demands made on Ruthel hardly supports the contention," said Pons. "It is quite possible that these demands were preceded by letters setting forth details known to the blackmailer, designed to leave the victim in no doubt about the blackmailer's knowledge, though no such letter was discovered by Norris Ruthel, the dead man's brother, who applied to us."

"Nor was anything of that sort found at either Bresham's or Stoner's," added Jamison.

Pons sat for a few moments in contemplative silence. "Has the Underground carriage in which the body was found been put back into service?" he asked then.

"It's still being sequestered, but I believe it will be released in the morning."

Pons came to his feet with startling suddenness. "Then there is no time to be lost. I shall want to examine it."

As Pons threw off his dressing-gown and got into his Inverness, Jamison reached for his bowler, complaining indignantly that Pons could hardly hope to learn anything more than the Yard had already learned, for the compartment had been thoroughly gone over, nothing had escaped the experts from the Yard.

"We shall see," said Pons. "Come along, Parker."

Still under guard on an unused line at the Willesden Green Station, the scene of Lionel Ruthel's death in the carriage was indicated by Inspector Jamison, still visibly disgruntled. There was nothing to be seen to set it out for the inquiring eye. Since Ruthel

had been strangled, no blood marked the spot. Indeed, the strangling had evidently been done with singular efficiency, for no disturbance whatsoever marked the area where Ruthel had been sitting.

"Had he fallen?" asked Pons.

"No. The body was in this corner, up against the window. Propped there, we made it."

Pons, having scrutinized the seat, now gave his attention to the floor. This seemed to me equally as futile as examination of the seat had been, for countless feet had walked there both before and after the crime and, except for dust, the floor was clear; not even so much as a shred of paper was visible. Pons, however, was not daunted; he went down on his knees and explored with narrowed eyes the area of the floor around the place where the body had been found.

At one spot he peered intently. "Let me call your attention to this portion of a footprint, Jamison."

The Inspector bent, baffled. He got clumsily to his knees beside Pons and stared at the spot Pons indicated, muttering, "Hundreds of footprints. What can they tell us? Nothing."

"This one is the print of a bare foot."

So saying, Pons handed the Inspector the magnifying glass he had been using.

"Why," said Jamison after but a minute's scrutiny of the small print Pons had discovered close up to the base of the seat, "that is the print of a child's foot."

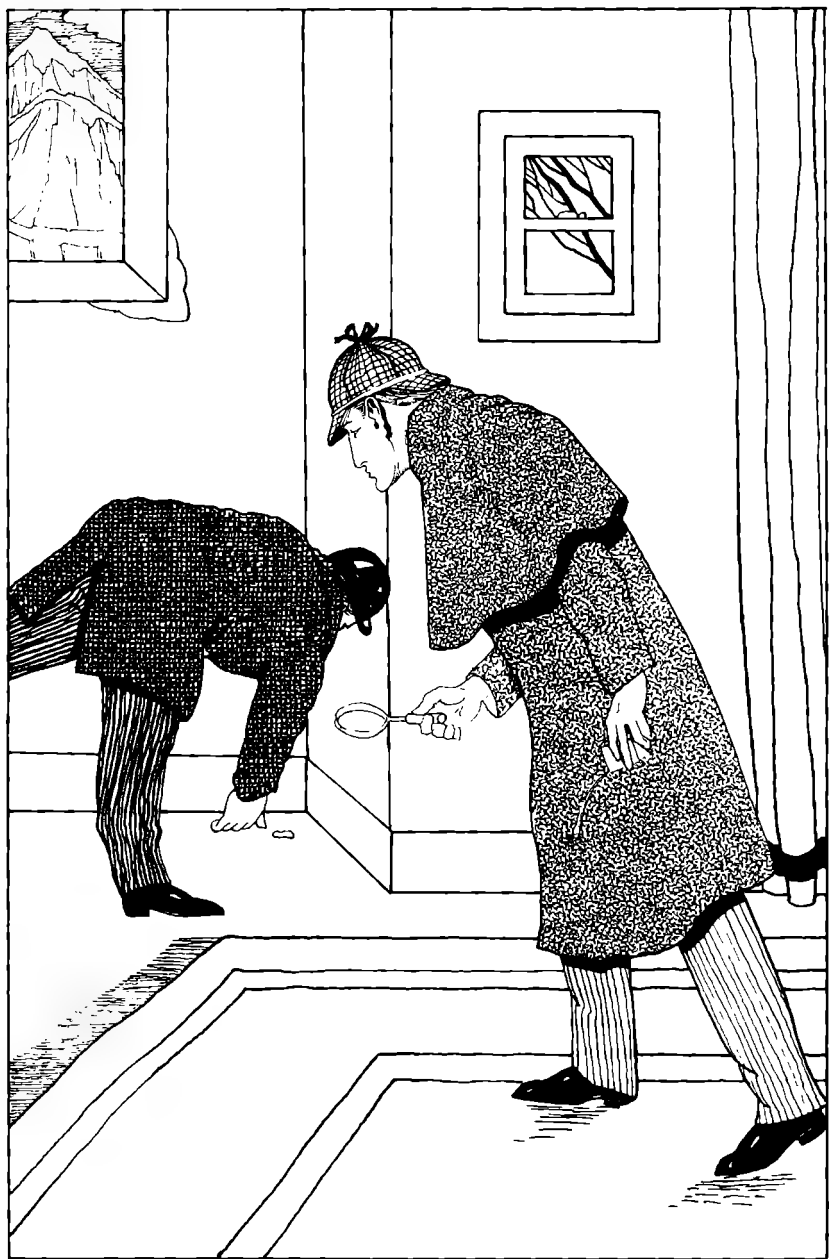
"Do you say so?"

"I do. You may not know it, Pons," Jamison continued, getting heavily to his feet, "but there are still children in London who are without shoes all year long. It is to be regretted, but there is simply not enough wherewithal to take care of all the indigent in our capital. They fare better in the country, though equally bare of foot."

"A much worn, deeply callused foot," said Pons. "Could a child's be that?"

"Compared to that of the average Londoner, I may say," said Jamison pompously, "that you lead a relatively reclusive life, Pons. You have no concept of the hardships the poor endure."

"Indeed," said Pons, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Then, if this print has no meaning to you, the Yard will not object to my scraping up some of the dust from around it."





Jamison hesitated, cannily aware of Pons's intuitions. "No, I'd say it won't matter. Spilsbury hasn't seen it, of course, so, if you do find anything, we'll count on your letting us know. In any case, the carriage goes back into service tomorrow."

"I will measure it first."

"It isn't even a complete print," Jamison said, as if excusing his permitting Pons to disturb the scene in any way.

"The ball of the foot and toes can be seen; the heel part has been trodden upon," agreed Pons. "But there is enough here to give us the dimensions."

He took from the capacious pockets in the lining of his cape a tape measure and went about his task. From outside the guard looked curiously in. Jamison watched tolerantly. The dimensions taken and set down in the little pocket notebook with pencil attached that Pons had fallen into the habit of carrying, Pons next brought out a small envelope into which he scraped the dust outlining the print on the carriage floor.

"I fancy that will do," he said, coming to his feet.

We left the carriage and mounted to the street, where Jamison's police car waited. The Inspector, thoughtfully silent now, had us taken back to our quarters and took his leave of us there.

For some time after our return Pons busied himself with the dust scrapings he had taken from the sequestered Underground carriage, working with his chemicals. He pored intently over the infinitesimal particles, saying nothing, though from time to time a small sound of discovery or pleasure rose from his corner. I sat impatiently waiting on him to finish his analysis, unable to concentrate on the evening paper, though the *Standard* did carry a further paragraph on what was now being called "the Underground murder," in which the only additional information given the public was the identity of the victim and some biographical details concerning him.

But at last Pons finished, put away his microscope and chemicals, and washed his hands.

"I suppose you can now give me a description of Ruthel's murderer," I said as he came over to lean against the mantel while he stuffed his pipe with the abominable shag he smoked from time to time.

"Oh, that is elementary, Parker," he replied. "He was a man of considerably less than average height, dusky skin—perhaps yellow-brown in colour, bare of foot, Indo-Chinese or Burmese. In London he lives somewhere along the Thames, in the region of the East In-



dia Docks. A fragment of hemp which very probably came from his foot suggests as much, and there is alluvial soil peculiar to an area of excavation there. Limehouse, I fancy."

"You are joking!" I cried.

"That fragmentary footprint was certainly not a child's," Pons continued. "It was too broad for its length, for one thing, and its lines were too deeply etched. Its callused character, too, indicated age. Moreover, there was just visible in part along the ball of the foot on the left edge—you will have observed that the print was of the left foot—a scar long ago healed. No doubt you also saw that the print had been made with some force. . . ."

"Ah, a heavy man!"

"No, no, Parker," said Pons impatiently. "He was light, slender of frame—the impression was forcefully made because he put more than his ordinary weight on it during the act of strangling his victim."

"Fantastic!" I protested. "We began this inquiry with seven women, as I recall. This does not sound like the crime of a woman."

"The murder was committed by a man, Parker."

"A hired killer, then?"

"A professional."

"A professional assassin—perhaps from Burma," I ventured. "Was not our client in Burma? Six months in Rangoon, I think he said. Would it not be instructive to learn who is the late Lionel Ruthel's heir?"

"I daresay it will turn out to be our client."

"I need hardly point out to you, Pons, that murder for gain is the strongest of all motives."

"And for the murder of the previous victims?" asked Pons. He shook his head. "I am much inclined to doubt it. Did our client seem to you the kind of fellow who would make so bold as to deceive me? I think not. No, I fancy we will have to look farther afield."

He sat for a while in an attitude of deep thought, tugging at the lobe of his left ear, a habit with which I had grown familiar early in our companionable relationship, his gaze into some distance from our quarters. He rose presently and began to pace back and forth in front of the mantel, arms folded across his chest, saying nothing. Now and then he glanced at the clock, as if estimating some matter of time, though it was not yet eight and darkness had not long come

to London. For perhaps ten minutes longer he paced the floor; then he came to a stop with a sudden exclamation.

"Simon Fancel!" he cried. "How blind I can be!"

Then he strode across the room and vanished into his chamber, from which came the sounds of a hasty change of clothing.

In a few minutes he reappeared. He was transformed. He wore the garments of a beggar, from a battered and torn bowler down to broken shoes. The pockets of his overlong coat bulged with the kind of refuse that could be found in the gutters of many London streets in the East End. He had even stained his face and, since he habitually disliked to shave, however often he did so, he had not to-day done so, with the result that a stubble was clearly visible along his jaws and chin. In one hand he carried a worn paper sack, evidently filled with more of the trash the kind of man he purported to be would gather.

"I am constantly amazed at your penchant for disguise," I said. "If I hadn't seen you go into that room, I would never have recognized you."

He made me a small, albeit ironic bow. "Ordinarily I do not respond to flattery, but in this case. . . ."

"You have certainly changed," I cried.

"*Touché!*" he replied. Then, sobering, he said, "I am going out," and, without any further word, he took his leave.

It was past midnight when Pons came in. Through the open door of my bedroom I saw him loom over the lamp I had left burning on the table, where I had propped up a message sent in by Inspector Jamison during his absence. I called out to him to make sure he did not miss seeing it.

"I see it," he answered.

His face in the light was a study in contrast. Clearly, what he read was neither unexpected nor wholly satisfactory.

"Jamison has looked into the accounts of the previous victims," he said at last. "Bresham withdrew no funds that could not be traced. Stoner drew out ten thousand pounds. No trace of it can be found."

"That's the same sum Ruthel paid."

"I observed it," said Pons dryly. "Bresham's death would appear to have had a salutary effect on the others. It strikes me as very likely that the three were in touch with one another, and all were implicated in the matter that served as the background of the blackmail. Bresham may have got word of the demand to Stoner

and Ruthel; his death certainly prompted payment of the initial sum demanded of Stoner and Ruthel. Neither would meet a second demand, so both died. We are dealing with someone utterly ruthless, and I hope to uncover him tomorrow night."

"You know him?"

"Say rather I have certain suspicions."

More than this he would not say. He put out the light and retired to his chamber.

Well after darkness had fallen next evening, Pons proceeded once more to assume his disguise of the previous night. Moreover, he laid out similar clothing for me to wear.

"We are swimming in dangerous waters tonight, Parker," he explained. "We shall be required to go armed."

"We are two against one, surely," I said.

"Would that it were so!" he answered.

"Where are we going?"

"To the East India Docks. It will not surprise you to learn that our goal is an importing office near the site of an excavation."

"Nothing any longer surprises me, Pons."

"I found the place last night after considerable searching," Pons went on. "I looked for the excavation. The fragments of soil in the dust edging the print in the carriage were not surface earth. The importing business is quite legitimate, but it also serves as a cover for something other. Last night thirty-one people entered that office; twenty came out. The other eleven were unaccounted for when the place closed. The manager also failed to emerge when the lights went out. Even though it may not be manifest to the eye, there is another exit below ground."

"Ah, the excavation!"

"The excavation has nothing to do with it. It is merely incidental to my discovery of the place, no more. I suspect that it will lead to a tenable solution of this interesting problem."

"Why do you say so?" I asked.

"It is elementary that only a comparatively widespread organization could produce, on demand, a lascar or dacoit to serve as a professional assassin. There is only one such in London, to my knowledge. It is part of a worldwide organization, headed, I am informed, by an ageless Chinese doctor of far more than average intelligence—a legendary figure not only throughout the underworld but also the political world. Perhaps you have never heard of the Si-Fan?"

"If I have, it has long been forgotten."

"The doctor's audacity is unbounded. His organization gives its name to that of the addressee to whom the late Lionel Ruthel was directed to send his money. 'Simon Fance'—it was no credit to my powers of observation that I failed to see it at once. The doctor's fine hand is surely in this. Though he has been reported at various times in Hanoi, Rangoon, Beirut, Cairo, Peking, New York, Rome, and elsewhere, the police now put him in London. His minions, however, are everywhere, and if he is not directly involved in this triple murder, he may very well know which organization is behind it. It is imperative that I find him."

We found ourselves presently in Limehouse, concealed in the shadows from a vantage point in which we could watch the entrance to an old building that carried a poorly lit sign announcing it as *Sam Lee Ltd., Importers*.

It was nine o'clock when we reached Limehouse. For the next forty-five minutes we observed visitors going into the importing office, and coming out again; but never quite as many emerged as entered. It was possible to see a man at a desk; he was approached by every visitor. Sometimes he unfolded brochures before callers, sometimes there appeared to be only curt, brief discussion. Now and then a visitor armed with brochures left the building; but just as frequently visitors repaired to the rear of the office, disappeared from sight, and were not seen again. There was obviously some kind of exit at the rear of the room, perhaps leading into an inner chamber.

Before ten o'clock, a shutter was closed over the wide window facing the street and the light went out in the importing office. As Pons had seen the previous night, the manager did not emerge. The street was wanly lit, but the glow of the street-lamp was sufficient to have disclosed anyone coming from the building, which rose but two storeys above the ground level. No light appeared anywhere else in the structure; nor had any shown earlier, suggesting that the upper floor was untenanted.

Pons made no move to leave our place of concealment even after the building had been darkened, and when I leaned toward him to speak, exerted a gentle pressure on my shoulder as if to bid me be silent. So we waited on time to pass. The night deepened; the activity along the street diminished and fell away to nothing but the occasional appearance of a constable on his round.

It was after midnight before Pons stirred. Then he led the way, drifting noiselessly across the street into the shadows beside the

building we had been watching. Well back from the street, a side window invited his attention. He paused, dug down into the bulging pockets of the threadbare coat he wore, and produced, from under the nondescript items he had assembled to carry with him, a small tool.

"Lend me your back, Parker," he whispered.

I bent down.

From above I heard the rasping sound of glass being cut—then, after an interval, of the window being raised.

Pons climbed into the building. He leaned out to give me a hand up.

Once we were both inside, Pons produced a torch, the light of which revealed that we were in a room behind the front office—evidently only a waiting-room of some kind. A few chairs, a lounge, a full-length mirror could be seen. Disappointingly, though the room patently ran the width of the building, there was no door to be seen but that leading to the front office.

"It must be the mirror," murmured Pons.

He strode over to it. He ran his fingers along its edge, examining, probing, until he found what he sought; then the mirror slid noiselessly to one side, disclosing steps leading down into a passageway dark save for one dim light above the foot of the stairs.

Without hesitation, Pons plunged noiselessly down the steps, his torch lighting the way. Less than fifty feet from the stairs, we found ourselves confronted by a honeycomb of passages, all of which showed evidence of frequent use. Pons dropped to his knees to scrutinize the stone flooring laid there, judging by its appearance, decades ago, for any clue to persistent use along one passage more than any other; but this proved non-rewarding. Nor was it necessary to lead us into the most used passage. Pons stood upright, flashing his torch around. He lifted his head and inhaled deeply.

"Do you smell it, Parker?" he asked in a whisper.

"The damp of the Thames," I said.

"Try again."

I took a deep breath. "Yes, I smell it now. Incense. Sandalwood."

"This way," said Pons, as he pressed on along a passage that led sharply right down a further trio of steps deeper beneath the surface.

It was presently evident that we were approaching occupied quarters, for there were occasional sounds ahead of us. Pons proceeded with greater caution, turning off his torch ever and anon,

lest our progress be marked. The scent of sandalwood had grown much stronger; it now seemed to pervade the entire passage, as well as lesser passages which now and then led away from what was clearly the central corridor.

Doors began to show in the walls. At each of them Pons paused to listen. I too pressed an ear to three such doors, and heard the even susurrus of breathing behind it.

"Someone sleeping," I whispered.

Pons tried each door until at last he found one that was not locked. He opened it noiselessly, at first but enough to assure him that all was dark within; then he widened the aperture and flashed his torch inside.

The light swept over a small bed-chamber, and fell finally upon a sleeping woman, lingering only long enough to show that she was Caucasian, not Oriental, however much the appointments of the room and our general surroundings were Oriental, and that she was perhaps younger than her worn appearance suggested. Then Pons turned off his torch and withdrew.

Not far down the passage another unlocked door opened upon a similar chamber. In this room, too, a woman of indeterminate age slept. Something of Pons's excitement communicated itself to me. Could these be two of the women he sought? But indeed, I did not know precisely what he was searching for. Withdrawing from the second room, he stood briefly in an attitude of deep thought.

Ahead of us, dimly visible in the wan light of the passage, loomed a door covered with what looked like green baize with a satin sheen. To this Pons now moved with cat-like caution. Manifestly, this door led to some central place in these elaborate underground quarters.

He pressed one ear to it. He sought in vain for any knob; it had none. Its mechanism was hidden. Pons explored its frame.

From somewhere behind it came the faint sound of distant bells—a tintinnabulation reminiscent of temple bells that evoked the Orient even more effectively than the scent of incense, which was now almost overpowering and apparently emanated from the room behind the door. Then all was still once more, save for what seemed to be the sound of a generator, which had pulsed steadily throughout the time we had spent in these subterranean passages.

Pons continued to probe the green baize door with his slender fingers—and once again the tinkling of bells sounded behind it. Pons withdrew his fingers abruptly.

"I may have set off an alarm," he whispered.

Suddenly that instinct—primitive in every man—of being observed, welled up in me. I turned—to come almost face to face with a dark-skinned, half-naked Oriental, lithe and muscular—and saw others behind him, coming in from both sides of the corridor. I had time but to cry out, to reach in vain for the gun Pons had given me to carry, when they were upon us. I saw Pons go down. I felt simultaneously a leather thong descend over my head and begin to tighten on my neck.

Just before consciousness slipped away, I saw the green baize door sink inward and slide to one side, and heard a sibilant voice issue a sharp command in Chinese. Then I heard and saw no more.

I came to with Pons bending over me, chafing my wrists.

"Ah, Parker, thank heaven you're not hurt!" he cried. "I would never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you."

I looked around dazedly. My neck burned from the friction of the thong that had come close to snuffing out my life. I saw that Pons's neck bore an angry red bruise to show that he too had almost been strangled, and had no doubt that I too carried such a bruise.

We were in a sumptuously appointed room of considerable size. Handsome Oriental rugs covered the floor; draperies of brilliant red, purple, and blue hung down the walls. I was lying on a divan; an impression beside me indicated that Pons must have been lying there too until he recovered consciousness. On a teakwood table nearby stood two glasses filled with liquid.

As Pons helped me to my feet, a sibilant, almost hissing voice arrested us; it came into the room evidently from a speaking tube behind one of the curtains.

"You will find something refreshing on the table, gentlemen. I am happy that I recognized you, Mr. Solar Pons, in time to save your life—in spite of that somewhat outré disguise you have effected."

"Doctor. . . ." began Pons. Our host's voice stopped him.

"We are nameless here, Mr. Pons. Pray refresh yourselves. I assure you it is the best obtainable Scotch. It contains none of those diabolical poisons which have been credited to my use."

Pons drank, and I followed suit, knowing as well as Pons that had our deaths been desired the speaker need only have kept from interfering when his dacoits were garroting us.

"What or whom do you seek here?"

"Elena," answered Pons.

There was a sharp hiss of indrawn breath. Then, "I am not unfamiliar with your reputation, Mr. Pons."

"Nor I with yours. 'Simon Fance' indeed. Was that not unworthy of you, Doctor?"

"That was not my hand. Someday, Mr. Pons, our paths may cross."

"I am here," said Pons.

"But not now. There are certain social considerations in this affair no English gentleman could ignore." There was, I thought, not only suppressed laughter in his voice, but more than a hint of scorn, if not contempt. "Evidence would be too difficult to bring out. I need hardly tell you that. You know little; you suspect much."

"Why only seven women, Doctor?"

"There were only that number in Marrakesch. There were others in Mexico, still others in the Middle East. Certain American, French, and German men have paid. It has been and no doubt will continue to be, a profitable undertaking. Of course, the victims of these gentlemen will be reimbursed, but it is only honest to say that an organization like mine is constantly in need of funds. You are well aware, Mr. Pons, that your national system of justice leaves very much to be desired, though the British sense of fair play frequently effects a balance. Disclosure would fall most heavily upon the unfortunate young women who were the victims of such men as Ruthel, Bresham, and Stoner, but they, apart from lending me their means without their knowledge, are completely innocent of my campaign on their behalf, and were set free from their brutal service and brought here on my direction."

"A campaign even more in your interests," said Pons.

"True," said our hidden host imperturbably. "I do not think, Mr. Pons, that this fact will in sum trouble you overmuch. You are a private agent, not responsible to the police. I too am a private agent, responsible to no one but myself—as you know. I am not a philanthropist, I am too old—far older than you can believe—to subscribe to the quaint idealism of the Caucasians, and I am imbued with the philosophy of the East, which does not hold to the same veneration for life that saturates your effete civilization."

"What will happen to the women you—rescued?"

"They will be returned to the world—perhaps not the world from which they were lured, unless they wish it. They will go free to choose their own courses, and with adequate funds to live on comfortably for a while. I am not philanthropic, Mr. Pons, but I am



not without compassion, despite my known ruthlessness, more compassion than British justice would afford them—merciless exposure, sympathy, but little coin of the realm.”

“Eventually the Yard will reach you, Doctor.”

“I think not. Tomorrow the importing office will be abandoned; the passage is even now being closed, filled in and sealed. Do not discount my thoroughness.”

“I would not forgive myself for underrating an opponent,” said Pons.

“Do not mistake me. We are not yet that. Had I thought we were, you would be dead. I am more familiar with your nature and your character than you can imagine, Mr. Pons.” There was now a pause, during which our host’s sibilant voice could be heard issuing orders in his native language to someone at his side. “Attend me now,” he resumed. “You will presently fall asleep. Do not be alarmed. Do not struggle against it; that would be needlessly futile. You will be transported from here by another exit, and you will wake in familiar surroundings far from Limehouse. Farewell, gentlemen. Until we meet again.”

Even as he spoke, I became aware of a cloying perfume, fragrant as the exhalation of heliotrope or mimosa, masking the scent of a powerful sedative pouring into the room from behind the curtains. I could not identify it, but suspected it to be Asiatic in origin.

“We’re being drugged,” I said.

Pons made a gesture of calm assurance, as if submitting unafraid to whatever ordeal lay ahead. “We have no alternative but to take the Doctor at his word.” He sat quietly, his eyes closed, waiting.

I felt myself growing drowsy. Though I fought against yielding, I knew I could not remain awake. As I fell asleep, I felt Pons’s body settling against mine.

I woke to familiar surroundings indeed. We were back in our own quarters at 7B, Praed Street. Pons was just emerging from his chamber, already clad in his mouse-coloured dressing-gown, and not in the least lacking in his customary alertness, though I felt groggy and dazed.

“Ah, Parker,” he said, “you are uncommonly sensitive to the Doctor’s sedative. I have been up and about for some time.”

“How came we here?”

“We were obviously brought. The Doctor leaves nothing to chance. It would not serve his purpose to have us discovered in a

state of torpor in a public park. A remarkable man! A pity that his life is given to crime and intrigue—and worse, to a megalomaniacal desire for world power!”

Struggling to shake myself free of the sluggishness that held me, I said, “I must admit I understand little of this.”

“You will, Parker. I hear our client’s step on the stairs even now. I sent for him.”

“At this hour! Why, it is almost four in the morning!”

“Any hour will do, Parker. If we are to move, we must move quickly.”

“‘If?’ ”

Pons regarded me soberly for a silent moment. “I said ‘if’ advisedly. I submit there are other considerations but those of simple justice.”

Norris Ruthel’s knock fell upon the door.

Pons crossed the room and threw the door wide. “Come in, Mr. Ruthel, come in. Pray forgive me for bringing you out at this hour, but events have come to a head. Sit down, sir. I need your advice.”

Our client, who had walked across and seated himself, looked at Pons with an air of surprised inquiry. “My advice?” he asked in an uncertain voice, as if he had not heard aright.

“I did not mis-speak, Mr. Ruthel,” Pons assured him. “I have uncovered certain facts. Before proceeding in the matter of your brother’s murder I felt it incumbent upon me to consult you.”

“Me, sir?” asked our client in unfeigned astonishment.

“You, indeed. As my client, you must be informed before anyone else. Specifically now, I must know whether to proceed or whether to lay such facts—I stress *facts* as I know them, other than what I surmise—before Scotland Yard for them to carry on.”

Ruthel’s pale blue eyes widened.

“Your late brother,” continued Pons, “was, with his partners, engaged in an enterprise other than the importing of art objects. It was a kind of exporting venture, if I may put it so crudely. My esteemed companion has suggested that there could hardly be a stronger motive for blackmail than murder; I submit that there are stronger motives, and one in particular that carries a deadly social obloquy that affects all the parties to it.”

Our client’s bewilderment was almost painfully evident, but he interjected no question.

“To put it bluntly—your brother, with Henry Bresham and George Stoner, was engaged in supplying young girls for the pur-

pose of enforced prostitution—the young women were lured from the country, very probably to Paris, and were abducted from there to be put into the brothels of Africa and the Middle East.”

Ruthel paled. “Lionel in the white slave traffic!” he cried in a strangled voice.

“I fear there can be no doubt of it, Mr. Ruthel.”

Pons waited for our client to compose himself.

“Go on, sir,” said Ruthel presently.

“Seven of these unfortunate women were discovered in a brothel in Marrakesch by the agents of a sinister Oriental who heads a worldwide organization dedicated to eventual domination of the world—a fantastic dream, the dream of a megalomaniac. From these young women he learned how they came to be there. He conceived the idea of blackmailing the men responsible for this hideous traffic—not only in England, but elsewhere on the Continent and in America. His agents rescued the girls who stood for the seven stars of the signature on your brother’s levying letters—the seven for whose impressment into prostitution your brother and his partners were responsible—and proceeded to levy his blackmailing demands upon them. The name attached to the letters—‘Simon Fance’—was in fact false, but it stood for the name of the organization, ‘the Si-Fan’—which, when I recognized it, led me to him.

“Faced with the threat of exposure, your brother paid the first demand made upon him. He balked at the second. Only a very powerful fear of disgrace—which would certainly have resulted from the exposure of his former activities—could have overcome his natural parsimoniousness, which you pointed out to us. But by the time the second demand was levied upon him, he had begun to recover the assurance he had lost when the first demand came to him out of a past he had thought buried in foreign brothels far from England. Your brother’s death—as well as others—was brought about through the agency of men in the Doctor’s service—devoted lascars and dacoits especially trained in murder.”

“Monstrous!” cried Ruthel.

“It is indeed,” agreed Pons.

“Can he and his men be taken?”

“Possibly. It has been tried before this,” answered Pons. “Are you sure you wish it done?”

Ruthel looked his surprise. “Ought not justice to be served, Mr. Pons?”

"I submit there are some who would say justice *has* been served, Mr. Ruthel."

"It must be done, sir!"

"Gently, gently, Mr. Ruthel. Pray reflect on this. I am little concerned for your late brother's reputation—but there are the young women to consider. If this matter is disclosed, they too will be discovered, their lives revealed, and their sordid evidence given to all the world. The press knows no mercy, as surely you are aware. Their lives, already badly scarred, will unquestionably be ruined. I do not condone murder—but justice, Mr. Ruthel, has more than one face. The young women are at present in London, and they will shortly be set free—with funds collected from your brother and others—to begin their lives again where and how they wish. If we proceed in this matter, they will hardly be able to do so after the spate of publicity, with their pictures in the papers, that must inevitably result. The choice is yours, Mr. Ruthel."

Our client bounded to his feet and began to pace the floor in agitation. "I see your point, Mr. Pons," he muttered, passing in one direction. "It will not bring Lionel back to life"—on his return. "I suppose it could not be done without involving them"—passing again. "No, no, hardly," he answered himself, returning. It was as if the demand for traditional justice vied visibly with his sense of fair play. "The whole issue is the demand for Judæo-Christian justice, in sum," he went on. "But what justice does that ultimately leave these unfortunate women?"

"Precisely," agreed Pons.

Our client came abruptly to a stand before Pons, planted his handsome cane hard upon the floor, and cried out, "We have had enough of it. If you will send me an accounting, I will send you a cheque, Mr. Pons. You must do as you see fit. I wash my hands of it."

After he had gone, I protested. "Pons, you cannot do it."

"Tut, tut—I can do as I like. Tomorrow I will place the essential facts before Jamison—the scientific knowledge gleaned from an examination of the dust in the Underground carriage, for example—and I will give him enough of what I surmised to put him on the track of the Doctor. But if I know our friend from the Yard, he will laugh at me, and nothing will come of it."

And so it turned out.

## *The Adventure of the Limping Man*

THE CEASELESS activity in which Solar Pons was engaged during the summer and early autumn of the year 1923 brought him at last to a stage where he was forced to choose either absolute rest or a nervous breakdown. Knowing how much Pons loathed the thought of inactivity, I put off broaching the subject of a holiday for as long as possible, but at last, early in October of that year, I suggested that both of us run up to the country estate of a good friend, Sir John Mollines, for a brief stay, which I secretly planned to lengthen as much as I could. Sir John's estate lay in Northumberland, near the Scottish border, in the midst of a well-populated district, though surrounding estates were quite extensive and the houses therefore rather widely separated.

Pons opposed the suggestion from the start, but sheer persistence on my part, coupled with his knowledge of his own condition, and my assurance that the nearby village of Durward was in easy communication with London, finally overcame his opposition, and he gave in after a week of dubiety and protest.

By the fifteenth of that month we were comfortably established in Sir John's country-house, which was far more than merely a house, what with its library and its stores. At my suggestion, Sir John had given the servants a fortnight's holiday, excepting only the caretaker, who remained in his lodge at the gate. We had the house to ourselves, therefore, and it devolved upon me to do the work of cook and housekeeper, not in any sense exactly a new experience for me.

But alas! for plans of mice and men! Pons spent all the first day resting, while I lost myself in a monograph concerning the mental aberrations of men and women of genius; beyond that first day, rest, as I understood it, was not part of Pons's routine. Nothing could keep Pons in the house on the second day. Indeed, he was already gone when I awoke that morning, and he did not turn up until some little time after lunch, and then only ran in with a briefly ironic, "I see you're up!" and left again before I had time even to protest.

It was not until after dark when he came in to stay. He was

begrimed and dusty, as if he had walked a long way. He said not a word as he entered, but walked with singular directness over to a sheaf of his papers, and a volume of his file of cuttings which he had insisted on bringing along from our lodgings in Praed Street. Armed with these, he came to the table and seated himself opposite me, looking at the dinner waiting for him with remarkable disinterest.

"We have most interesting neighbours to the north, Parker," he said musingly, a thoughtful glint in his eyes.

"Indeed! Were you resting there?" I asked, eyeing his clothes in studied disapproval.

He ignored my thrust. "I fancy you've heard of the Melham family?"

"I must admit I am not a walking directory."

"Come, Parker," he challenged impatiently. "Surely you can't have forgotten the strange disappearance of Sir Peter Melham! Let me see—" he paused and frowned briefly, as if he had any necessity to recall facts which were doubtless at his fingertips—"that was three years ago, I believe."

I sighed and settled back, shaking my head in disapproval which did not stem his enthusiasm.

"He vanished sometime in October, if I recall rightly," he went on blithely. "I brought my notes on the matter up with me, since I rather hoped that Sir John's lodge was near the Melham estate."

"Certainly you aren't planning to reopen that old matter?"

"Not unless I am asked to do so."

"Well, there is little danger of that. The case is pretty well closed."

"Say, rather, it has rested. It is as far from being closed as it ever was. No case is definitely closed until it is solved."

During this brief exchange, he had been going through his papers, and he had now come to his notes relating to the disappearance of Sir Peter Melham. I felt all my hope for his holiday fading, for I saw in his keen eyes once again all the excitement of the chase. As if he had read my thoughts, he looked up and fixed me with a sharp glance.

"Perhaps you would rather hear nothing more of the matter, eh?"

He had me; he knew he had. "I would rather you had forgotten all about it—but now that you've interested yourself, go on."

"Very well, then. I have a good summary of the case here. Sir Peter took possession of Melham Old Place, as it is called, in late

May 1920, after selling his London house; he came with his daughter Maureen, his wife having died many years earlier. Melham Old Place has always been the family seat, and it was at that time occupied by Peter's brother Andrew, a paralytic confined to his bed. Sir Peter was engaged in business on the Continent, and Maureen was to remain with her uncle during his absence. His ultimate destination on the Continent was Prague, though the nature of his business was never revealed. He set out on the night of October seventh, 1920, leaving Melham Old Place with two bags and a portfolio. He was known to have purchased a ticket for London at the Durward station, and he was seen to enter the midnight express from Edinburgh shortly after ten o'clock. That was the last seen of him. His punched ticket, with his bags and portfolio—all were found in a first-class carriage compartment at King's Cross.

"In his deposition, a ticket-inspector stated he had punched Sir Peter's ticket somewhere out of Reveling, which is well away from Durward. Sir Peter had not been in evidence; he had assumed that Sir Peter was either in another compartment or in the lavatory at the other end of the carriage. The ticket lay on the seat; he had punched it and replaced it; at King's Cross he had found the ticket just where he had put it after punching it. The indication, therefore, was that Sir Peter vanished in the vicinity of Reveling."

"Yes, I remember it now," I said. "Quite extraordinary."

"Sensational," corrected Pons. "I have some memory of the investigation pursued by Scotland Yard, whose men were sent as far afield as Prague, to discover if possible what was known of Sir Peter there. But nothing was—beyond his two monographs; so that his destination was never revealed, since it was apparently as much of a mystery to his brother and his daughter, as to Scotland Yard. Of course, the usual rumours began to circulate immediately, and ranged all the way from suspicion of murder—for what motive no one ever tried to account—to wilful disappearance."

"Had Sir Peter anything to gain by vanishing?"

"Nothing, apparently, and all to lose. Of course, old family history is always a source of great interest to rumour mongers and those who have little to do with their time. But the history of the Melham family offers comparatively little of major interest. The family first came into prominence through the knighting of Sir Mark Melham—born in 1832—in 1867. The sons, Andrew and Peter, were born in that year, and Lady Melham died shortly

thereafter. Not long after, Sir Mark removed to London, and there he stayed until he died in 1911.

"Young Peter briefly troubled the family in 1887, when, after an affair with a Miss Rose Hadley, he eloped with her. The young lady was the daughter of a woman who had been recommended to Sir Mark as a housekeeper for Melham Old Place. When Peter was next heard from, he turned up with his small daughter, Maureen, saying he had married Rose Hadley, but that she had died shortly after giving birth to the little girl. Sir Mark refused to recognize either his son or his grandchild; he executed a new will in favour of Andrew, cutting Peter off. This was in 1899; Maureen was then three years of age. After this cold reception, Peter entrusted his daughter to her relatives on her mother's side, and returned to London, where he came to some prominence in 1902 by distinguishing himself in the scientific field with two monographs and a minor invention. He supported his daughter and assured her education.

"Sir Mark died in 1911; Sir Andrew inherited the estate, and Sir Peter, now knighted for scientific service to the Crown, returned to Northumberland to suggest a partition of the estate, to which Sir Andrew did not agree. This time Sir Peter took his daughter back to London with him. There was a period of coolness between the brothers for some years, but early in 1919, after Sir Andrew sustained his paralytic stroke, their coolness was forgotten, and they kept up a warm correspondence up to the time of Sir Peter's final leaving of London."

Pons looked up from the papers. "Now does that not present a prosaic background for that inexplicable disappearance?"

"Ah, you consider it inexplicable, then?"

"No, no, nothing of the sort. You misinterpret me. It has been inexplicable up to this time; beyond that I will not go. You know my methods; you know my confidence; you ought not to tempt me in this fashion, Parker. It is quite possible that I may be drawn into this matter—even against my will."

"Against your will, indeed!"

"I fear you are becoming too dogmatic, Parker, especially in regard to your diagnoses. Recreation and rest do not necessarily imply mental and physical stagnation."

"There is no good in your stirring up this old mystery, and surely no one will invite your services at this late date."

"You forget there is Miss Maureen Melham, who must certainly



be interested in the fate of her father. She is now twenty-seven, and decidedly attractive, I should say, judging by the glimpse of her I got through my glasses this afternoon." He smiled ruminatively. "I daresay it is no surprise to you that it has come to her ears that I am in the neighbourhood."

"Impossible!" I cried. "I have maintained the strictest secrecy!"

"Dear me! How reprehensible of you! Now I, on the contrary, immediately noised my coming about. Our lodge-keeper carried the information over to Melham Old Place with commendable dispatch."

"I think it most unwise. . . ."

"I may as well tell you, Parker, I expect Miss Maureen Melham to call on me not later than eight o'clock tonight. And now, I think we had better do justice to the meal you have had waiting here all this while."

There was nothing more for me to say.

It was almost eight o'clock, and only a few moments after Pons came in that evening, when a faint rap sounded on the heavy oaken panels of the outer door. I rose at once and admitted a young woman whose attractiveness had not been done justice by Pons's comment at dinner. She wore no hat, and her hair was lightly but agreeably disarranged, as if the wind had blown into it and not fully escaped; it was dark, ashen hair, complementing the grey of her eyes. She was dressed in a neat tweed walking-suit, the jacket of which was unbuttoned, since the night was warm. In her right hand she carried a stick, which she tapped almost with impatience against her shoes as she stood looking from one to the other of us. Her eyes, however, with true woman's instinct, fixed on Pons even before he spoke.

"Miss Maureen Melham, I take it," said Pons, placing a chair for her and courteously inviting her to be seated, so that her face was illuminated by the lamp on the table, and so betrayed a distinct uneasiness. Her lips parted twice, but no words came. She flashed a glance at me, looked to the windows, looked back at Pons.

"Pray be at ease, Miss Melham," said Pons. "I observe you are carrying a heavy stick, obviously for protection; you may safely discard it here. Manifestly, you consider the stick necessary. Why?"

"In the light of past happenings, Mr. Pons, I cannot help but feel that I am in physical danger."

"Yes, I observed you were followed here tonight."

She started. "How could you know that?"

"Ah, I was behind you all the way from Melham Old Place. Apart from myself, whom I modestly assume to have been invisible, there were two people interested in your actions. I understood that your young man was the one, and had no difficulty concluding that he is not in favour at your home, for he met you some distance from it. But the other follower—I found him quite interesting."

"There was another? Besides yourself?" She was plainly frightened.

"Oh, yes. A short man, quite old, I should say; he walks with a slight limp."

Miss Melham's expression was briefly of fear before she controlled herself; nevertheless, she half-rose from her chair, and her hand clenched around the heavy stick. "It is he!" she cried. "The limping man. The man I came to see you about tonight."

"No, Miss Melham, forgive me," replied Pons calmly. "The man who followed you tonight carried no cane; I understand the apparition you have seen of recent weeks is in the habit of carrying one."

The girl nodded and looked at Pons in some perplexity. It was as apparent to her as it now was to me that Pons had withheld something from me at dinner, that he knew something more of the immediate background for Miss Melham's visit than he had cared to tell me.

"The man who followed you tonight bears a close resemblance to the man I saw about the premises of Melham Old Place once or twice this afternoon. Indeed, I should say the two men are one and the same. His left hand, I could not help seeing, is or seems crippled. Who is he?"

"He is Jasper Bayne, my uncle's valet and secretary."

"And presumably he has a reason for following you?"

"Yes. My uncle, Sir Andrew, is opposed to Hugh—my 'young man,' as you call him, whom I hope to make my fiancé—and it is very likely that he sent Jasper to follow me and find out whether I met Hugh."

"Surely your uncle can have no valid opposition to a family as good as the Bettertons?"

"But he does. I have always been given to understand that Hugh's family is among the best in Northumberland, and therefore my uncle's opposition to him is most astonishing; he offers me no reason for his stand."

Pons's interest quickened. He leaned forward. "Ah, perhaps your uncle offers a substitute?"

"Yes, and that is the most puzzling feature of the matter, Mr. Pons. He does offer a substitute."

"Do not keep us in suspense, Miss Melham."

"It is Robert Bayne—Jasper Bayne's son."

"Capital! Capital!" exclaimed Pons, smiling. "And young Bayne? What does he say of the matter?"

Miss Melham was briefly taken aback, not understanding that Pons's enthusiasm was prompted by his delight at this perplexing ramification. "As for Robert—he is a very sensible and well-educated young man. He does not relish the idea any more than I do, and he cannot understand why my uncle, who, though always fond of Robert, has never before given any indication that he would like him as a member of the family, should suddenly come out with such an idea. We have always been friendly, but there has never been any thought of marriage between us. Finally, though neither his father nor my uncle knows it, Robert is already secretly married."

"It would appear then very much like an understanding between your uncle and Jasper Bayne."

"Very much so, Mr. Pons. And that is all the more reason why I cannot understand it. Why Mr. Bayne should presume to think I would marry his son, and why my uncle does nothing to prevent Bayne from such presumption, actually going so far as to oppose my engagement to Hugh, are questions I cannot answer."

Pons smiled. "Ah, well, perhaps my poor talents may discover the answer for you."

"I would appreciate it very much if you could, Mr. Pons."

"But at the moment I am far more interested in the apparition of the limping man of whom you spoke."

"Yes, it was really about him that I came to see you. You have heard the legends, I suppose?"

Pons nodded. "It would be well, however, to review the entire matter. Let us begin with the first occurrence you can remember."

"That was last August. I woke up one night and I heard a faint tapping, as if someone were walking about with a cane. I listened. It seemed to come from the long hall on the ground floor."

"You investigated?"

"Not then. The noise did not disturb me at first. I wondered who could be about so late—it was after one in the morning. Two nights later, I heard the same sound at about the same time. That time I got up and went into the hall on the first floor, where I sleep. But as soon as I opened my door, all sound ceased. On the following

night, I heard similar sounds again, and after that, heard them regularly.

"I could not help beginning to analyze the sounds. It seemed clear that whoever it was walked with a stick. The more accustomed to it I became, the more I began to notice that the faint footfalls accompanying the taps of the cane were characterized by the peculiar irregularity of a man with one game leg." Our visitor's voice sank lower, and she leaned forward a little. "It was then, Mr. Pons, that I first thought of my father—since then, I cannot think of anything else!"

"Indeed! I was not aware that your father was in any way crippled."

"Oh, but he was, Mr. Pons. A month before we left London he fell and severely hurt his leg; since that time and up to the point of his disappearance, he habitually used a stick. The limping sound I heard during the night was one peculiar to him." She hesitated.

"Pray continue."

"I was afraid, Mr. Pons. I don't know why, but you are aware, of course, that I know nothing of what happened to my father, and for a while I thought that he was coming back—back from—the other side. I have always believed him dead."

"And you thought his restless spirit walked?"

"I did, Mr. Pons. It was foolish, I suppose; but I could not help it. I saw nothing all that time, I just heard those dreadfully suggestive sounds; what was there left for me to think? For, each time I mentioned it, no one else had heard it, and I was looked at askance, as if I had taken leave of my senses."

"And then?"

"Then, Mr. Pons, on the night of September seventeenth, I woke up and heard the sounds approaching, as always, along the first-floor hall. The tapping of the cane and the dragging footsteps paused outside my door, and it seemed to me that someone fumbled at the knob; then the sounds passed on. I got up cautiously and opened the door. There was no one—nothing in the hall.

"I was naturally much disturbed, and next morning I spoke to my uncle. He was also troubled, and immediately recalled the old family superstition—that whenever bad fortune comes upon our house, the spectre of the last member of the family to die appears to give warning by his presence."

Something in her manner bespoke her spirit. "You were not convinced, Miss Melham?"

"Certainly not. On the contrary," answered the young lady with

considerable heat, "I began to think someone had got into the house with the deliberate intention of planning mischief."

"Is that not a curious change in your point of view?"

"Not as curious as it might seem," she answered readily. "My uncle's heart is not strong; it has never been strong since his initial attack. Any untoward event might bring on a fatal seizure."

"But surely you would benefit?"

"Not solely. There are several large bequests—to Bayne, to the widow of an old friend and neighbour, and so on."

"Go on, Miss Melham."

"Then for a time nothing happened. In the interval—on the twentieth, to be exact—I proposed that Hugh call on Uncle Andrew to suggest our engagement. Up to this time, you see, I had no suspicion that Uncle would oppose Hugh. But the suggestion that I made threw Uncle Andrew into a frightening fury; I could not understand it, and believed at first that he thought me guilty of a secret affair with Hugh. Naturally, this hurt me very much."

"That is most interesting," commented Pons. "Up to that time you had no reason to complain of your uncle's treatment?"

"None."

"You found him trying honestly to take your father's place?"

"Mr. Pons, almost from the day of my father's disappearance, Uncle Andrew has done everything in his power to keep me happy and satisfied here."

"Ah, and before then?"

"Well, before then, I think there was something of that old coldness about my mother that influenced him; he was kind, but reserved, somewhat aloof. As soon, however, as the full responsibility for me fell to him, Uncle Andrew thawed out and became very considerate and kind. That was all the more reason why I could not understand his abrupt rage."

"And what did you do?"

"At first I refused to consider what he had to say, but when I saw that he was genuinely upset and distressed, I promised to think the matter over if he would give me a month. He made some small objection, but finally consented. His attitude made me feel very awkward and strange; it seemed so different from his previous treatment of me."

"Yes, I daresay it did. And about the limping man?"

"I heard him again on the night of the twenty-first, on the first floor. And that night, when I threw open my door, I saw him, too."

He stood at one end of the hall, and as I looked at him, he seemed to disappear. I don't know what happened; it was just as if he disintegrated, Mr. Pons. But above everything else, I noticed one horrible, frightening thing. Though I had only a momentary glimpse of him, dressed in a long white gown of some kind, with a darker gown over that, and carrying a heavy cane—Mr. Pons, I could have taken an oath that he was the image of my father!"

"You were fully awake?"

"Fully. I made no mistake. Even the posture was familiar."

"You have considered the possibility of hallucination?" persisted Pons. "And the known fact that very often in such cases one sees what one expects to see rather than what is actually there to be seen?"

"I thought of all that, Mr. Pons."

"You made no attempt to ascertain how the figure you saw vanished?"

"None. I cried out, and directly thereafter, my uncle called to me from his room. I ran there, which was only a few doors away from my own, and told him what I had just seen."

"Ah, and he?"

"He was not surprised. He seemed, in fact, to be expecting it. He fell back upon that old superstition and intimated that his own death was presaged in this apparition."

"He did not doubt that it was a spectre?"

"Not for a moment. He was insistent. He admitted, too, that he had not been feeling well, but he would not hear of getting the doctor when I suggested it, as I did, of course, immediately. After all, whatever differences there are between us, Uncle Andrew is all I have left."

"Did it occur to you to ascertain whether Jasper Bayne had seen the ghost?"

"It did. Mr. Pons, he not only had seen the ghost, but ventured to go so far as to tell me I was the cause of its appearance!"

"Ah, Mr. Bayne is exercising the fancied prerogatives of all servants who have become part of the household. What had your uncle to say of this?"

"He reprimanded Bayne, of course."

"And no doubt he was thereafter twice as uncivil to you?"

"Yes."

"And the apparition?"

"Continued to appear, though at longer intervals."

"Thus far you have not given any explanation of your impression that you are in physical danger, Miss Melham."

"Our lodge-keeper warned me one day that Jasper Bayne meant mischief, and since then I have continually carried this heavy stick."

"Has Bayne given you cause to believe the lodge-keeper's warning?"

"Not apart from his hostility. He does not seem to like me. But then—I have been aware of being watched from time to time; I have never seen anyone, but I know someone watches me."

"Inside or outside?"

"Both, Mr. Pons."

"Ah. And what is it you expect of me, Miss Melham?"

"I would like you to discover who it is walking about at night—phantom or man—and why."

Pons looked at her with a certain commiseration. "Does it not seem to you that there may be unpleasant aspects beneath the surface in this matter, Miss Melham? It is altogether probable that I may unearth facts which, to put it bluntly, may be most objectionable."

"That makes no difference in my attitude, Mr. Pons. Will you or will you not help me?"

"I will."

"Very good. Thank you. Then I must warn you against Uncle Andrew. I know he would be furious if he discovered I had enlisted any outside aid in laying our ghost. If you visit Melham Old Place, as you undoubtedly must, please come in secret, and preferably by night; Uncle Andrew is suspicious of strangers, and he has always been highly sensitive about his partial paralysis."

"I understand."

"If possible, I would like you to come to the house tomorrow night—at or near ten o'clock. If you will go to the south wall, you will find the French windows left partly open. I will be waiting for you in that room."

She rose to go, and I got up to show her out.

"You may expect me, Miss Melham," said Pons, as our attractive visitor moved toward the door in my wake.

"I rely on you. Good-night, Mr. Pons."

I came back into the study and found Pons bent over his notes.

"Does it not seem to you that the nightjars have become suddenly active?" he asked, a smile at his thin lips.

From outside came the weird call of a nightjar, and immediately after, another and yet another; then came three short harsh calls. "The region is infested with the birds," I said.

"Ah, but such regularity! I fancy the cries are a signal for lovers' meetings. Now, then, come here, attend me, Parker." He thrust a paper toward me, and then, as I bent toward it to see that the paper he tendered me bore no writing whatever, he spoke again in a scarcely audible voice. "Raise your eyes very slowly. There is a man looking in through the window opposite."

Though I started slightly, I did as he suggested and saw, framed in the darkness of the window, faintly glowing from the light within the room, the pale white of a man's face. It vanished even as I looked, but not before I had seen two high black lines of Mephistophelian eyebrows and eyes regarding us with burning hatred!

Instantly Pons was up and out of the house, leaving me in some agitation and concern lest he had entered into danger, and unable to forget that malefic face at the window. When Pons at last returned, my relief knew no bounds.

"Thank heaven, you are safe!" I said. "Who was he?"

"Jasper Bayne. He followed Miss Melham here, and followed her back. I followed him. I cannot believe he means her harm, for his actions were rather protective than otherwise. She met young Betterton, but Bayne did not interfere, only keeping well out of sight. He watched her into the house, and it was not until her window showed a light that Bayne himself went into the house. I continued to stand watch, and observed shortly after Bayne's entrance a dimmed light make its appearance on the first floor, perhaps three windows—and three rooms—removed from Miss Melham's."

"But surely Bayne does not sleep on the first floor?" I cried, somewhat surprised that a gentleman who had given so much evidence of being class-conscious as Sir Andrew, should tolerate a servant's sleeping on the same floor as the members of his own family.

"Dear me, no! Certainly not. I submit he went up to report what he had seen of Miss Melham to Sir Andrew."

"The two have an agreement, then?"

"Of some kind, undoubtedly, I fancy. But what do you make of the affair, Parker?"

I had been giving the matter considerable thought. "It seems very



simple at the outset, but you have so often warned me about coming to hurried conclusions that I hardly know whether I should say what I think or not."

Pons laughed. "If you have so little confidence in it, it must assuredly be a faulty theory."

"Well, it strikes me that Bayne has a hold of some sort on Sir Andrew Melham, and that, as a price for his secrecy, he demands that Sir Andrew's niece marry his son Robert, which would give the estate to his own line, since Miss Maureen is the only heir."

"And the spectre with the limp?"

"Surely it is Bayne in disguise?" I ventured. "For that might frighten Miss Melham into submission to the plan."

"Ingenious, Parker, if a little obvious. I congratulate you. But you seem to have forgotten that the central mystery is not that of the arrangement between Bayne and Sir Andrew; we must assume that such an arrangement exists, for whatever reasons. But there remains the fact that the limping man made his appearance *before* there was any suspicion that there was an understanding between Miss Melham and Hugh Betterton. It is always possible that Bayne may be the apparition, but in view of this circumstance, his motive must be questioned."

"What do you make of it, Pons?"

"I fancy it is a little early to formulate an opinion." He shook his head. "But I much fear that the matter is far from as simple as it seems to be. Miss Melham is stirring far more deeply than she dreams."

"You have a theory, then?"

"Yes. It should be obvious, Parker. You have all the facts; you know my methods. Apply them."

With that I had to be content.

It was almost two o'clock the next morning when Pons appeared, following his rendezvous with Miss Melham. The expression of annoyance on his face apprised me that his expedition to Melham Old Place had produced anything but satisfactory results.

"A most disappointing affair," he said bitterly, moving his notes to one side. He struck a match and held it to his pipe; then he leaned back and regarded me for a moment in thoughtful silence.

"The spectre did not appear then?"

"On the contrary, he came on schedule. But my own plans were

subject to events over which I had no control. Miss Melham did me the unexpected honour of having her young man present – for help, if necessary, as she explained. Despite several pointed hints from me, he stayed. Since no amount of suggestion on my part was likely to send him away, I resigned myself, with results which were well-nigh disastrous.

“The room in which I met Miss Melham and Mr. Betterton is a kind of study, opening off the drawing-room, and looking out upon one end of the great hall on the ground floor of Melham Old Place. At the other end of the hall, a double stair leads up to the first floor, or rather, to a landing halfway up, and from there on it becomes a single stairway. Next the foot of this stair, on the far side of the house, are the servants’ quarters and, adjoining them, precisely opposite the drawing-room, are Jasper Bayne’s rooms. All the other rooms on the ground floor are unoccupied. We stationed ourselves in the drawing-room, prepared to watch the hall for the appearance of Miss Melham’s spectral man, and there we sat quietly until midnight.

“At that hour, matters quickly came to a head. The spectre duly appeared – but on the far side of the double stair. He was descending slowly, moving along the wall toward us, and came steadily down into the hall itself. I need hardly say there was no suggestion of the supernatural about him, save that his face was not very visible, because it was sunk into the folds of a dressing-gown about his neck. He came on, limping and tapping his cane much as Miss Melham had described him. He came, in fact, almost opposite us, when the futility of my plans became evident.

“Young Betterton, doubtless carried away by the sight of what Miss Melham had so often talked about, darted past me with a cry and lunged for the limping man. The spectre raised his cane and swung at him with telling effect. Betterton fell, but before I could dash to his aid, Miss Melham was inconsiderate enough to faint in my arms. As a result, the spectre vanished in the *mêlée*, and on top of this ridiculous spectacle, the door of Jasper Bayne’s room opened and he himself strode out into the hall, holding a lamp high in one hand, and fiercely grasping a stick in the other. He took in the tableau at a glance.

“ ‘Mr. Solar Pons, I believe,’ he said coldly.

“I nodded to him, and began to retreat to the drawing-room with Miss Melham, when she came to and struggled upright.

" 'I do not think you are welcome here, Mr. Solar Pons,' said Bayne with ill-concealed anger. 'Nor is he,' he added, pointing to Betterton.

"Miss Melham dismissed Bayne rather sharply, and we turned our attention to Betterton, who, for his pains, had received an unpleasant clout on the head, which, I'll wager, he will not soon forget, and which, with any luck, will incline him less to impulsive action. As far as the identity of the spectre is concerned, the entire evening was wasted. Besides accomplishing nothing, the household is now on guard, and we can expect nothing of any moment for some time to come."

"You did not see what happened to the spectre?"

"Ah, yes, I managed that. There are several points of interest to be noted. For instance, the cane which struck young Betterton is at least a very material object. I have no doubt we may assume that the spectre who wielded it is fully as material. He appeared, as I said, midway up the far side of the double stairs. Obviously then, he could not have walked the length of the great hall, gone upstairs, and been halfway down before being noticed, since we were watching for him. I fancy, therefore, he must have come not from the lower floor, but from the second storey. And as to his disappearance—this took place just across the hall from where we were hiding in the drawing-room; in fact, it was almost precisely before Jasper Bayne's door."

"Surely that is conclusive!" I cried. "He simply got rid of his dressing-gown and came back out."

"Slowly, slowly, Parker. Not at all. He wore a dressing-gown and pyjamas. He was therefore abed, or at least he was in his room. If it must be admitted that the spectre came from the second storey, it could not have been Bayne, for we had his quarters under eye throughout the preceding two hours. No, I think we cannot suspect Bayne of playing ghost. His lamp was certainly not alight before the spectre appeared, or we would have noticed its glow beneath the door. And if Bayne did play the ghost, he certainly made an uncommonly swift job of getting rid of his paraphernalia and lighting his lamp. Yet, it is equally certain that the spectre disappeared into his room."

"I hold to Bayne, Pons."

"If so, what motive did he have to carry on his deception over a month before Miss Melham made known her attachment for Hugh Betterton?"

"As to that, I can't say. What of Sir Andrew?"

"Ah, you have reached that point, eh? I took occasion yesterday afternoon to consult the physician who attended Sir Andrew during his paralytic stroke, and I have his absolute and unconditional assurance that Sir Andrew could never possibly walk again. I fear Sir Andrew is out of the question."

"Then we have a third party to consider."

"Obviously. And his identity ought to be clear enough. I am, however, not quite certain of the motive behind this complex and dark business, and I fear the matter must just rest until tonight's excitement at Melham Old Place is forgotten. If only Miss Melham had left matters entirely in my hands! As it is, I should not be surprised if events have been precipitated and we shall shortly hear from Miss Melham."

Pons spent the next two days making inquiries in Durham and about the countryside. He learned that Jasper Bayne was the son of the late Sir Mark Melham's secretary, and that he had grown up with the Melham boys, and had been as disturbed and grieved by Sir Peter's unsolved disappearance as Sir Andrew had been. Pons was able to make several routine examinations of Melham Old Place by means of his binoculars, but could detect no signs of unusual activity.

However, matters were soon to be brought to a head.

On the night destined to resolve the mystery, a violent storm broke out. The day had been sullen and close; Pons had seen the storm approaching early in the evening and was in the house when it burst. We sat for some time listening to the furious driving of the rain against the windows, beating upon the glass and the shutters before a wind almost of gale proportions. I saw that Pons was listening intently, and indeed the wind was distinctly foreign to us, unused as we were to such blasts in London. I could not read, and Pons appeared to be ill at ease.

"I should not be surprised if something happens over there tonight, Parker," he said at last, turning to me.

"Why tonight?" I asked, smiling. "Because of the storm?"

"Dear me, no. But Miss Melham's month is up today. She may well be asked for her decision in regard to young Betterton. Since we know she has no intention of giving him up, and that young Bayne has no intention of marrying her, since he could not even if he wanted to, her decision will break the tension and will doubtless

effect a rift between Bayne and Sir Andrew. What may come of that should be of considerable interest."

Pons looked up at the clock, while I turned his words over in my mind. It was ten minutes of midnight. "Well, it is almost twelve; if he still walks, the limping man will soon be on his rounds."

At this moment there came a furious pounding at the door. Pons was up on the instant, and I followed him into the hall. As he swung the door open, the limp figure of Miss Maureen Melham fell forward into the room. Pons caught her and supported her, heedless of the rain driving in through the open door. She was dripping wet, and breathing rapidly, obviously having run through wind and rain to the house. I closed the door and turned to find her clutching the lapels of Pons's dressing-gown.

"Mr. Pons! Something terrible has happened. Don't lose a moment! Jasper Bayne has been murdered, and my Uncle Andrew is dying—shot, too!"

She brushed her hair from her eyes and stood away from him, for he took time only to seize his mackintosh before he left the house. Miss Melham would have taken after him, tired and wet as she was, but yielded to my insistence that she wear my own raincoat; then the two of us ran blindly through the rain and wind, over open fields softened by the rain, through underbrush of the scattered copses on the way to Melham Old Place.

We were drenched to the skin when we got to the house. But Pons's wild run had got him there in ample time before us to have the situation already well in hand. A man had been dispatched to the headquarters of the county constabulary; another had been sent for young Betterton, since Pons had assumed that Miss Melham would want him to take over when Pons had finished. We had entered by the French windows and had come out into the lower hall where a huddled group of servants stood at a distance from the body of Jasper Bayne, which lay at the foot of the stairs, clothed only in nightgown and dressing-robe. Bayne lay on his back, his arms flung wide; his face was no longer malevolent, being now white and pale, and his cold, sightless eyes were devoid of the hatred I had first seen in them. Even the black Mephistophelian brows were no longer terrifying. An irregular red stain on his breast told where he had been shot.

Pons was bustling about in a perfect storm of action—running in and out of Jasper Bayne's room, and up and down the stairs. "Yes,

yes," he said excitedly, as we came up to him, "he was shot on the landing, and rolled down."

"But by whom?" I demanded.

"By whom but the limping man? The whole ridiculous jigsaw is clear as day, Parker; I have been only a little short of being obtuse. Now, then—we can do nothing for Bayne. Let us attend to Sir Andrew."

So saying, he hastened up the stairs, whither Miss Melham had already gone, and followed her into Sir Andrew's room, the door to which stood open.

Sir Andrew Melham lay in his low bed, breathing painfully. Miss Melham knelt beside him.

"Your field, Parker," said Pons.

I bent above Sir Andrew, trying not to disturb too much Miss Melham's attention to him, for there was evident between them now a strong attachment; she held one of her uncle's thin hands in hers, and was trying hard to keep back her tears. The man's bony outlines were plainly visible through the few coverings, which I turned back to attend to his wound. But it was manifest at a glance that he was dying. I staunched the flow of blood from his wound, and stood back.

Despite the look of age upon him, Sir Andrew's eyes were sharp and piercing. He looked past me to Pons, who had seen the weapon on the floor, identified Pons, and spoke to his niece.

"You had better go, Maureen. I wish to speak to these gentlemen, alone."

Miss Melham bowed her head and relinquished her hold on her uncle's hand. Sir Andrew's eyes followed her to the door; only when it closed behind her did he turn to Pons once more.

"Mr. Pons—you know?" he asked, watching him with his sharp eyes, which looked so vital and alive in his wrinkled features.

"Yes, Sir Peter!"

The dying man nodded. "I am Sir Peter Melham, yes. You can guess what we did, Bayne and I. We were mad, Mr. Pons—mad! It was the estate, of course. My brother swore that my daughter would not inherit at his death. I can't know now whether he meant it; but I thought he did, then, and it maddened me." He put one hand weakly over his eyes.

Pons said nothing.

"It is said the devil protects his own—and he put one in this

house to protect me. But I killed him tonight, you see, and now myself, to keep everything from coming out." He challenged Pons. "For the love of God, sir, will you keep it from her?" He made a feeble gesture in the direction of the door through which his daughter had passed.

"I think it can be done, Sir Peter."

The dying man made an attempt to rise on his elbows, but it was too much for him; before Pons and I could reach him, the wound began to gush blood anew, and he fell back, coughing and collapsing into his bed. Sir Peter Melham was dead.

When we came from the room, we found the police and Hugh Betterton in charge. Pons went directly to Miss Maureen Melham, doubtless to tell her Sir Peter was dead. Then he stepped over to the police-officers and the doctor, and drew them aside; they went together up to Sir Peter's room, and it was some time before they came down to where I waited.

An hour later, we were on our way back to Sir John Mollines's country-house. The storm had passed now, and the moon shone from the western heavens, casting a dim, eerie light on the landscape, which was still so wet that our progress was slow. We walked for some distance before I spoke at length to say that the solution of the puzzle left me with little to conjecture, though I must admit I was not entirely clear as to what had taken place.

"Ah, it was simple enough," said Pons. "Suppose you go back three years to that October night when Sir Peter left Melham Old Place on the way to Prague. It should be relatively easy, in the light of tonight's events, to follow him. At Durward he purchased his ticket for London; he stepped into the train from Edinburgh, and that was the last seen of him. Sir Peter got into the train, and as soon as it began to move—perhaps even before—he got out again."

"But surely he would have been seen!" I cried.

"The hour was late. He may have waited until the train had pulled out of Durward and got back through the countryside. His motive for making away with his brother was obvious; he himself told us of it before he died. He had Bayne's aid, and Sir Andrew undoubtedly lies buried in some remote spot on the estate. The boldest stroke of the whole wretched business followed, when Sir Peter took his dead brother's place. As you were told, they were twins; their resemblance was marked; moreover, Sir Peter had watched his brother long enough to have memorized his actions; and he knew that since Sir Andrew no longer had regular medical







attention, he was safe. His greatest difficulty lay in deceiving his daughter, but he succeeded. Next to that, his inability to enjoy relaxation imposed such a strain on him that he had to resort to walking about by night.

"So the stage was set for Jasper Bayne's betrayal. You can well conceive what Sir Peter's feeling must have been when he discovered that Bayne had promised himself that Maureen Melham must marry his son, Robert. From that time on the breach between the murderers widened, and doubtless then, too, Sir Peter's nocturnal ramblings were made with less care and more agitation, as he passed to and from Bayne's room and his own, and so he was mistaken for his own spectre by his daughter. On the night we almost had him, he was doubtless on his way to Bayne's room, and remained hidden there until the household was once again quiet.

"What happened tonight must be clear. Miss Melham gave her supposed 'uncle' her decision; he in turn informed Bayne when Bayne came to his room; Bayne delivered his ultimatum, which was the threat of revelation—very probably not to the police, since that would involve him, too—but to Miss Melham, in the knowledge that she, to conceal her father's crime, would acquiesce to Bayne's plan, for Bayne never did know of his son's marriage; and Sir Peter gave Bayne his answer—which was to pursue him from the room and shoot him as he was descending the stairs, after which, as we have seen, he shot himself."

"Amazing!"

"A remarkable but annoying affair in which I failed to distinguish myself, because I disregarded one of my own primary concepts—that what is most baffling on the face of matters is often most simple in essence."

## *The Adventure of the Shaplow Millions*

SOLAR PONS LOOKED up from the morning post, chuckling. "Try your hand at that, Parker," he said, handing a letter across the breakfast-table.

It came with a breath of fragrance. "Ah, perfumed stationery," I said. "From a lady."

"Elementary," said Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons, Dear Sir," I read. "Even though I have been told you don't handle my kind of trouble in your private inquiry practise, I am sure only a cad would deny his assistance to a lady in need. If Arthur thinks he can do me out of my share of the money by just divorcing me, he's got another think coming. I've promised myself the best detective in London. I'm not going to give up my share without a struggle. He thinks because he's a Major in the Second Regiment of the King's Horse Guards nobody can touch him, but we'll see about that, and Mr. Pons, I believe you're the man to do it. If it's all the same to you, I will call on you at ten-thirty tomorrow morning." The letter was signed in a flourishing hand, "Rosie Shaplow." She appended an address in Chepstow, Monmouthshire.

I looked into Pons's twinkling eyes. "You are surely not going to demean yourself by exploring the lady's marital affairs," I cried. "Matters of divorce are beneath a man of your calibre."

"Ah, let us not be hasty, Parker," said Pons. "It involves no commitment to hear what the lady has to say. Moreover, there is an intriguing little note in the letter—apart from some mystery about 'the money'—that interests me."

"It is no more than a sordid divorce proceeding," I said.

"You observed nothing else about Mrs. Shaplow's letter to give you pause?"

"Except that Mrs. Shaplow would appear to be a vulgar woman, given to saturating her stationery with cheap perfume. . . ."

"On the contrary," interrupted Pons, "it is costly—a cloying and much-advertised perfume from Paris."

"The principle is the same. She can hardly write a coherent letter."

"True, she becomes increasingly indignant at the thought of losing a share of 'the money.' But there is at least one other little point."

"I fail to see a facet of interest beyond the commonplace."

"Yet Mrs. Shaplow is so specific I have no doubt she has been impressed time and again with her husband's importance."

"It is a role husbands play without effort."

"While I have no interest in Mrs. Shaplow's marital difficulties, I confess to a tickling of curiosity about a fellow who vaunts his membership in the Second King's Horse Guards. In any case, it is far too late to put the lady off. She will be here within the hour."

In half an hour before the appointed time, our client presented herself. She proved to be an attractive blonde in her mid-thirties, dressed in the height of expensive bad taste, and wearing a furpiece around her neck, though the weather was much too warm for it. She flashed no less than five gaudy rings and reeked of perfume; as if that were not bad enough from my point of view, she had a singularly annoying habit of fluttering long, and, I was sure, artificial eyelashes over her cold blue eyes.

"I said to myself that Mr. Solar Pons would take my case," she announced with easy self-confidence, as she settled herself in the chair Pons proffered and fluttered her lashes at him where he stood leaning against the mantel. "I can pay—and if I get my share of the money, I can pay well—as well as you've been paid, Mr. Pons."

"Indeed," said Pons, keeping a straight face with difficulty.

"As soon as the suit is settled, that is."

"Ah, there is a suit before the courts?"

"Oh, yes, I should say so, Mr. Pons. Over seven million pounds! And he can't lose it, I should say, with a Certain Personage in it with him. They are the two parties to the action, as my husband puts it." She seemed to be proud of the circumstances, but in a thrice her indignation boiled up again. "But if he thinks he can up and divorce me without even going to court—just by having his important friends stamp the papers, why, I'll not stand for it, I certainly won't."

Pons's face, I saw, was now alight with interest. "Pray start at the beginning, Mrs. Shaplow," he urged.

She was momentarily stopped in her flow of words, but not for long. With a little laugh, she said, "I suppose it began when I married Arthur three years ago. He had already started the suit then. Not that, as you might say, he needed the money—he was that

good a provider, he never left me in want of anything—but with one thing and another, I suppose we were apart too much, he was always having to go up to London, and he still does to this day, takes the 8:17 for Paddington every morning, as regular as you please, five days a week, always on the watch for new investors, because of course he never had so much money to fight the bank with over so many years, and the sum's worth it, indeed it is."

I was surprised at Pons's willingness to permit our client to go on so, but he seemed, if the evidence of my senses were not to be distrusted, to be engrossed in her account, which was delivered in a very rapid manner, as if Mrs. Shaplow were utterly unfamiliar with commas or periods. Indeed, his eyes glittered in their intensity, and he caressed his earlobe in such a manner as to denote unusual interest—and in nothing more than the customary details of the prosaic sordid story of a divorce action!

"But the suit isn't *my* story," she went on without interruption from Pons. "I suppose it's the old story. I suppose Arthur met another woman in London and took a fancy to her. He was always the one to give in to quick like or dislike—that's Arthur. Naturally, he wouldn't say anything to me. Not that I didn't notice anything. I could tell he was cooling on me, but it didn't worry me at first. Three days ago he told me we were all through—divorced, and he put the divorce decree in my hands."

She opened her purse as she spoke, and, producing the document, thrust it at Pons, who leaned forward from his position at the mantel and took it. With but a cursory glance at it, he laid it on the mantel next to a packet of letters.

"Mr. Shaplow has left you?"

"He has, indeed! Taken a room at the George, in Chepstow."

"Ah, he has not transferred to London?"

"No, Mr. Pons, he has not."

"But he continues to come up to London five days a week?"

"I believe so," she answered. "It's that matter of the suit. And, Mr. Pons, I mean to have my share of that money when the suit is won. The bank is fighting it, naturally—with seven million pounds at stake, I'm not surprised they would." She gave another decided nod and added, "I'd fight, too!"

"He left you without funds, Mrs. Shaplow?"

"Oh, no, not that, Mr. Pons. He gave me a bundle of notes."

"How much, precisely?"

"Well, I didn't count it," she said carelessly. "But I'd say it was close to a hundred pounds."

"Ah, then you are temporarily provided for."

"It's not money I need right now, Mr. Pons," said our client. "I need someone to follow him and find out what he's doing and who he's seeing. And you're the man for it, Mr. Pons. I'm sure of it. I know all about you. They don't call you 'the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street' for nothing. I brought along a photograph of him. It's three years old, but he looks about the same now."

The purse next gave up the photograph. This in turn was handed to Pons.

He scarcely glanced at it before he laid it on top of the document on the mantel.

"I propose to pay you a little something now, and more when you've found out for me what I want to know," said Mrs. Shaplow. "And then, of course, when I get my share of the money, you shall have a handsome fee."

"Mrs. Shaplow, I will undertake to make some inquiries in the matter," said Pons gravely, standing now with his hands clasped behind him. "At this point, however, I prefer not to accept a retainer."

"Well, that's very satisfactory, Mr. Pons," answered our client, bouncing to her feet. "I won't argue with that. All I want is something to hold over his head so that I get what's coming to me."

"Ah, you don't want Mr. Shaplow back?"

"With me, Mr. Pons, it's all or nothing. I won't share a man and if Arthur's found someone he fancies more—why, good-bye Mr. Shaplow! That's the way I feel. I was never one to cry over spilt milk. Life's too short for that. Rosie Shaplow never shed tears over anything very long. If it's another woman, she can have him. If it isn't, he'll be around one of these days."

With a proud flourish of her blonde head, she bade us good-day.

Listening to her tripping down the stairs to the street, Pons glanced whimsically over to me. "What do you make of that, Parker?" he asked.

I fear my voice betrayed a certain indignation and pain. "I can only say that I am shocked—there is no word for it—at the fact that you are about to become involved in a vulgar divorce action."

"Ah, I regret disappointing you, Parker," said Pons, smiling. "But the action, it would seem, has been concluded."

"Well, its aftermath, then," I said. "A suit for alimony."

"I do not recall that our client mentioned 'alimony.'"

"She ran on without end about her 'share of the money.'"

"Seven million pounds," said Pons reflectively. "It gives one

pause. The action instituted by Mr. Shaplow appears to have been directed against a bank. Mrs. Shaplow has lived with its details for three years."

"But if the action had not been concluded at the time of the divorce," I pointed out, "she is not entitled to any share of the amount awarded, unless, of course, she is a direct party to it. She doesn't seem to be."

"Let us just have a look at the decree," said Pons.

So saying, he slipped the document out from under the photograph and opened it. I came up and looked around him. The document was a formal decree of divorce, properly signed by Lord Merivale, the President of the Divorce Division of the High Court. The decree was absolute.

"There is no provision here for alimony," I said.

"And no record of a court hearing," said Pons. "An extraordinary document! Are our legal processes now so simplified that a divorce can be obtained so freely?"

"She may not have contested," I pointed out.

"True."

"And evidently no children were involved."

"Mrs. Shaplow did not impress me as a lady eager to encumber herself with the care of children," I said. I could not help adding, "Pons, why—*why* did you choose to have any part of this?"

"It does not strike you that there is something of more than ordinary interest about Mrs. Shaplow's problem?" he countered.

"It is common, disgusting—nothing but possible adultery and a lust for money!" I cried.

"I submit there is more here than meets the eye," he said imperturbably. "Indeed, I am even more intrigued than I was by her note, now that I have heard her story."

"You cannot mean it!"

"I was never more serious. Let us have a look at the object of Rosie Shaplow's ire."

He exchanged the divorce decree for the photograph our client had left. It was that of our client and her husband, taken, I deduced, quite possibly on their wedding day, for the background looked suspiciously like a registry office. Our client had assumed a pose I could only call simpering, while her husband gazed out at the world with calm, level eyes, the gaze of a self-assured young man. Moreover, he was dapper in appearance, almost elegantly well dressed, and with what I should have described as a com-

manding presence which was not in any way diminished by what I took to be a monocle dangling from a cord about his neck. He wore his hair pomaded, and his upper lip was decorated with a closely clipped moustache.

"He appears to be a man of means," I said.

"She would seem to have got much the better of this bargain," observed Pons dryly.

"I don't doubt it."

"I have a fancy to know the major," said Pons.

"You need only meet the 12:40 at Paddington tomorrow."

"Dear me! How unimaginative! I should prefer to be more subtle. What do you say to a week or so in Chepstow?"

I was astonished. "Why go to Chepstow when he comes to London daily?"

"I would prefer to have him come to us," said Pons enigmatically.

"I must admit I don't follow you, Pons."

"Rely upon your increasing skill at ratiocination, my dear fellow," replied Pons. "Just hand me that *Railway Guide*, will you?"

I gathered, from the place to which he turned in the *Guide*, that he was looking up Chepstow; in a few moments he glanced at the clock on the mantel, and confirmed my deduction.

"We can take the 3:55 for Chepstow, if you are willing. I have one or two little things to do by way of preparation, while you, if you will, can wire the Beaufort Arms for quarters for the week, and apprise Mrs. Johnson that we will be in for a late luncheon every day, and for no other meal."

When I returned from these errands, Pons was behind the locked door of his room. I heard his voice from time to time, as if in conversation, and it was presently manifest that my companion intended to play a role not his own in the course of his inquiry. In an hour there emerged from his room a bent, crabbed old fellow who bore no resemblance to Pons, save in the aquilinity of his nose and the piercing glance of his eyes. He wore a thick ulster, and carried a steamer rug and cane, while his face was concealed behind carefully composed lines of age, framed by white sideboards, moustache, and a tuft of neatly trimmed beard.

"What on earth are you up to?" I cried.

He made a little bow, clearly enjoying himself. "Colonel Septimus Barr, at your service," he said. "And you, Parker, will serve as my companion. You need not change," he went on, magnanimously.



"You are so much the gentleman that you will fit into any such role with ease."

I acknowledged the compliment, but not without a touch of uneasiness. "Have I not heard you speak of Colonel Septimus Barr?" I asked.

"You may well have done so. There is, indeed, such a person, but he will not in the least object to my borrowing his name and personality for the nonce."

"I know your fondness for disguise," I said, "but I fail utterly to understand the need of it in this matter. Surely the best course would be to watch our client's husband and, since this is clearly beneath a man of your talents, it can be done simply by retaining an agency that specializes in that sort of thing."

"I daresay I ought to bow to your superior knowledge in marital matters, but I am eccentric enough to prefer my own way," he replied, chuckling. "But you need not burden yourself."

Pons knew full well that I would not hold back, no matter what his plans, and once I had arranged for a *locum* to take care of my few patients, we were on our way.

By nightfall we were ensconced in the Beaufort Arms at Chepstow, on the west bank of the beautiful winding Wye just above that river's junction with the Severn. Our quarters looked toward the ruined castle near the river, in the southeast tower of which Henry Marten, the regicide, was imprisoned for two decades, and beneath which he was buried at his death in 1680. The grim ruins and the derelict slipways of the now-abandoned dockyards, constructed for use in the recent war, dominated that bank of the river, but all else was serene and singularly beautiful, perhaps all the more so in the soft twilight that held the countryside around Chepstow.

And, as Pons had planned, next morning we were on the 8:17 train, bound for Paddington. We traveled first-class and Pons spent his time poring over the financial pages of the *Daily Mail*, leaving me to enjoy the most attractive river scenery in England as the train advanced up the Wye, bound for Ross before turning toward Gloucester.

"What can you hope to accomplish by this?" I asked presently.

"It is a gambit, no more. It may fail," said Pons. "But I rather doubt it. I submit that our client's husband may be in search of just such passengers as we seem to be. If that assumption is correct, he





will invariably be attracted by the attention I pay to the financial pages."

"Assuming that he sees you," I said.

"I rather doubt that he sits still," said Pons with a self-satisfied smile.

"Why do you say so?"

"I am persuaded to believe that Major Shaplow does not report for work in an office in London, particularly not one in which he is subject to the orders of someone else," said Pons.

"Well, that is certainly plain as a pikestaff," I retorted. "He could hardly take a train that would not bring him into London until after noon, if he had to report for work somewhere."

"So it follows that the Major is self-employed," continued Pons.

"Pressing his lawyers to push his suit, most likely," I said.

"Ah, I wonder," murmured Pons, and resumed his scrutiny of the paper.

For over four hours thereafter we roared through the countryside; and, after three hours in London, we returned to Chepstow the way we had come. Though I forebore to say so, it seemed a kind of madness to me. Pons devoted himself to the financial columns, though I fancied that from time to time he flashed a bemused glance in my direction. I endured the almost nine hours of traveling in an increasingly crowded train stoically enough, but on our return to Chepstow, I could not restrain my protests.

"Pons, this is unlike you. I have grown accustomed to more positive action."

"Ah, well, Parker, as any angler will tell you, different fish respond to different baits," he said blandly.

"What has fishing got to do with it?" I cried. "Mrs. Shaplow has set forth her case and expects you to act upon it."

"To obtain for her, if I recall correctly, her 'share' of 'the money,'" prompted Pons. "Surely you will grant me the same ambiguity of which she was guilty? I assure you we will play this gambit no more than a few days."

"That is a crumb to be grateful for," I said, I fear, ungraciously.

Pons only smiled in that superior fashion that never failed to nettles me.

In the morning we were once again on the 8:17. All was as before, save that the day was more cloudless than yesterday. But already I was tiring of the landscape, for all its singular beauty—of

the winding Wye, whose surface I scanned from time to time in search of coracles, now fast disappearing from England's rivers—of the Twelve Apostles and Wyndcliff and even Tintern Abbey in its lovely meadow—of Symonds Yat and the Welsh marshes and the Severn Tunnel, so rapidly growing familiar; and I was little drawn to the book I had brought with me to read, perhaps because of the vexation I felt at Pons's oblique course to his end. I began to find the prospect of three more days of such traveling infinitely wearying.

We had gone past Gloucester on this morning, however, when I was suddenly conscious of someone's having paused in the corridor to look into our compartment—a bemonocled gentleman, expensively dressed, whose glance seemed to be directed first at the object of Pons's scrutiny, and then at Pons himself. He stood so for only a few seconds; then he was gone.

"Major Shaplow, of the Second King's Horse Guards," murmured Pons dryly.

"I recognized him," I said. "A trifle older than his photograph."

"But even more appropriately dressed," observed Pons. "I fancy we have not seen the last of him."

"I have seldom seen you so confident and for so little reason."

"Ah, it is not confidence, Parker. I submit it is the science of deduction. The Major and I share a common interest at this point. Money. He has seen me poring over the financial columns. In half an hour or so, he will return this way to see whether I am still engrossed in these columns. I will be. He will then presume to introduce himself. Apart from a suspicion natural to my identity, I will not find his intrusion unwelcome. We shall hope to enjoy his company."

An unpleasant premonition began to take shape in my mind. "Pons, you are surely not planning to part the Major from some of his money by trickery!"

"Perish the thought!" cried Pons, laughing heartily.

In the course of the next forty minutes, I observed Major Shaplow passing our compartment twice. When he appeared for the third time he did not pass, but paused diffidently, tapped on the frame of the door, and stepped in.

Pons looked up indignantly.

"I trust you will pardon my intrusion, gentlemen," said Major Shaplow rapidly. "I could not help observing your devotion to the

financial columns, sir," he went on, speaking directly to Pons, "and it occurred to me that you might be looking for a promising investment."

"I happen to be doing so," said Pons stiffly.

The Major took out his card, and with a low bow presented it to Pons, saying, "Permit me, sir."

Pons took it with ill-concealed suspicion, gazed at it for a moment, and then muttered aloud what he read on it: "Major Arthur Howells Shaplow. The George. Chepstow, Mon." He handed the card across to me.

"Major," I said, perceiving that Pons meant me to, "this is Colonel Septimus Barr of London. My name is Parker."

"My pleasure, sir," said the Major, bowing punctiliously.

"Well, well, sit down," said Pons ungraciously. "You don't seem to be an investment adviser."

"Colonel Barr is forever looking for a high return on his investments," I put in.

Pons flashed me a sudden keenly appreciative glance.

Major Shaplow smiled. "Surely we all are."

He was indeed a handsome fellow, and I found it easy to believe that the ladies found him irresistibly attractive. He had a youthful appearance that surely belied his age; he appeared to be one of those fortunate men who age very slowly, who maintain the bloom of youth well into middle age. Moreover, his hands were manicured, his hair, though pomaded, was not offensive, his moustache waxed. I detected about him the faint astringency of a cologne or lotion, possibly used after shaving, but a trifle too effeminate for my taste. He had to decide where to sit, and chose to sit next to me.

Opposite him, Pons favoured him with a searching and still somewhat hostile stare. "You spoke of investments?" he said finally.

"You may have heard of me, Colonel," said the Major cautiously.

"Can't say I have," said Pons curtly.

"Ah, well, they try to keep matters as quiet as they can," said the Major lightly.

A gleam of interest shone in Pons's eyes. "'They,' sir? Who are 'they'?"

"I should say, Colonel, that this is as yet a highly confidential matter—viewed from both sides of the issue," said the Major with annoying caution.

"Damme, sir, I don't know what you're talking about," said Pons in well-feigned vexation, his lips and beard atremble with impatience.

"I refer to the subject of the investment, Colonel," said the Major with simple dignity, "but I prefer not to broach the subject unless I can be certain of your interest."

"What rate of return?" snapped Pons.

"It may go as high as twenty per cent," said Major Shaplow levelly.

"Indeed, indeed," replied Pons with obviously mounting interest. "What is it—utilities, steel, foreign bonds?"

"Colonel, forgive me—nothing so prosaic," demurred the Major.

"Come, come, man—we'll be in London before you get around to saying."

"Colonel, it is unique."

"Ah, I have heard such words before, sir."

"You have never heard of an investment like this."

"What the devil is it?"

"Colonel, may I bank on your complete confidence? And yours, Mr. Parker?"

"Of course, of course," said Pons testily.

"Very well, then. Gentlemen, it is a suit against the National Shires Bank. The sum involved is seven million pounds."

He said this in a hushed, conspiratorial voice which carried great conviction.

Pons fell back and sat for a moment open-mouthed. Then, leaning forward eagerly, he asked, "Can you win it?" In a masterly touch that conveyed more than anything else an old man's greed, he ran his tongue avariciously out over his lips.

"I cannot lose it," the Major answered, almost in a whisper. "I have been joined in the action by a person of the highest rank."

"Names, sir, names!" cried Pons.

"May I show you the papers, Colonel?"

"By all means!"

Major Shaplow rose. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, and darted out into the corridor.

"Pons, what are you up to?" I asked.

"I am after the money, Parker," he answered, chuckling. "And so is Major Shaplow."

"Twenty per cent!" I cried. "Small wonder!"

"Hist," whispered Pons. "He will lose no time."

In less than a minute Major Shaplow returned, carrying a laden briefcase. He now carefully closed the door of our compartment before sitting down again, this time next to Pons, and opening his briefcase.

"Pray bear with me, Colonel," he said, as he began to take documents from the case. "I want to show you the papers in the matter so that there cannot be any doubt in your mind."

"I should warn you, Major," said Pons, "I'm a cautious man."

"Had I not concluded as much I would not have risked intruding upon you," said the Major.

Pons grunted eloquently.

Major Shaplow now drew from among the papers taken out of his briefcase one that he allowed Pons to look upon only briefly.

Pons gazed down. His eyes widened. His jaw dropped. "His Majesty!" he murmured, awed.

"No less, Colonel. It appears that the institution in question refused to handle war loans in the recent war, and His Majesty is determined to avenge this insult to our country. He has joined me in the suit."

Here Pons held up one hand imperiously. "Stay, Major. I do not yet know the basis of the suit."

"Four years ago the bank dishonoured a cheque of mine drawn upon it. There were funds in the bank to meet it. I inaugurated the suit for damages; understandably, the bank fought it, and with every delay the sum has risen. With His Majesty's entry into the matter, the sum was fixed at its present figure."

"How long can the bank fight it?" asked Pons.

"Not more than another year."

"And you propose that I invest in your claim at a return of twenty per cent?" said Pons.

"I believe I said it might come to twenty per cent."

"Twenty per cent," said Pons inexorably.

"Colonel, let me show you some of the other documents."

Thereupon he passed them to Pons, one after another, and Pons in turn passed them across to me. They were indeed amazing and impressive, for many of them bore famous signatures, among them those of Lord Sankey, Lord Hewart—the Lord Chief Justice, and many other dignitaries of the Royal Courts of Justice and Somerset House, as well as of the world of banking. One was clearly signed by His Majesty. There were also official paying-in slips of the Bank of England, one for as high as twenty thousand pounds; on several of



them was the signature of the chief cashier, long familiar to me, since it appeared on our Treasury notes.

"I wanted you to understand the magnitude of the suit," said Major Shaplow quietly. "I have exhausted my own funds. I cannot apply to His Majesty, for obvious reasons. So I must appeal to investors—and I am forced, by the exigencies of the matter, to make the appeal privately."

"These documents appear to be in order," said Pons, impressed.

"I assure you, Colonel, on my honour, they are. You have seen the signatures and the official seals. They are on record at Somerset House and the Courts of Justice."

"I am surprised that the bank has not offered to settle," said Pons.

"Oh, they have—but for a sum far, far below that I asked. They have made a settlement offer several times. At first it was for but a few thousand pounds, but as the principal named in the suit rose, so did their offer. It is now at a hundred thousand pounds."

"Ah!" cried Pons sharply. "So that even if the suit were not pressed and the settlement offered accepted, an investor could not lose!"

"No, sir," said Major Shaplow. "That is precisely the point."

Pons took a deep breath, bestowed a narrow-eyed look of intent calculation upon Major Shaplow, and said again, bluntly: "Twenty per cent."

"On one condition, then," said the Major, conceding.

"Name it."

"That the sum invested be in bank-notes."

"Agreed," snapped Pons. "How much?"

"Colonel, I need five thousand pounds."

Pons took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly.

"But if you do not have that much to invest, I shall be grateful for whatever you feel you can put into the suit," the Major went on.

"Three thousand," said Pons.

Major Shaplow hesitated only momentarily. Then he nodded.

"We shall have to have an agreement," said Pons.

Once more the Major nodded, "Of course. I will draw it up and bring it with me whenever you say."

"I will have time to go to my bank when we reach London," said Pons, choosing his words carefully. "Make a note of that, Parker. Three thousand pounds for Major Shaplow's action. Meet me tonight at seven, Major. I have a flat in Bayswater. My name is in the directory. Colonel Septimus Barr."

I found my voice at last. "Perhaps Major Shaplow will permit me to invest a thousand of my own?"

"And do you, too, insist upon twenty per cent?" asked the Major sadly.

"Come, come, Major," put in Pons testily, "one can hardly make exceptions between friends."

"Very well, gentlemen."

"If I were a drinking man, Major, I'd ask you along to the refreshment car and drink to your millions," said Pons. "Good luck, sir! We'll meet tonight."

Major Shaplow closed his briefcase on his precious documents, rose, clicked his heels, and bowed. "Until tonight, Colonel Barr—Mr. Parker." Then he let himself out of our compartment.

"Extraordinary!" I cried. "Small wonder that Mrs. Shaplow wants a share of the proceeds!"

"I daresay it is safe to venture that she has been living on the anticipation for some time," agreed Pons.

"Twenty per cent. You drive a hard bargain, Pons."

"So do you."

"I followed your example. I am a novice in these matters." I could not help adding, uneasily, "But I confess I do not see how you are acting for Mrs. Shaplow in this."

"At this point, Parker," said Pons, "—I should have thought it evident—I am not acting in her interests, but in my own." He chuckled. "I have seldom had the pleasure of meeting so engaging a fellow."

"Yet you were positively churlish."

"By design, Parker. I venture to say that any association between Rosie Shaplow and us is remote from his thoughts!"

"An astonishing action," I said. "And the mass of detail in the documents!"

"These matters demand care," said Pons. "We are nearing London. I fancy we ought to have a witness to tonight's transaction. Perhaps Jamison is off duty and can be persuaded to act for us."

Once back in our quarters, Pons busied himself for a while on the telephone. Disdaining the luncheon Mrs. Johnson had prepared, he was in and out of 7B, without troubling to remove his disguise—paying a visit to his bank, and another to Colonel Barr's Bayswater flat, to assure himself of the Colonel's acquiescence in our use of his address and his absence from it for the evening.

Then he sat down and wrote a brief note to our client.

"Ah," I cried, when I saw the address on the envelope, "I see it all now. You mean her to be here, tonight, and take possession of some of the money after it has changed hands!"

Pons favoured me with an astonished stare. "This letter could hardly reach Mrs. Shaplow until tomorrow," he said dryly. "There are times, Parker, when you have marked relapses from the level of ratiocination to which you have progressed!"

"Perhaps I had better get over to the bank," I said then.

"I fancy a cheque will do. I do not recall Major Shaplow's having insisted upon bank-notes from you."

"Well, that is a relief," I said. "I will just prepare a cheque."

By half-past six that evening we were in possession of Colonel Septimus Barr's Bayswater flat. Inspector Jamison, off duty, had met us there, his ruddy face disclosing his perplexity. He made several pointed comments about being asked to witness a transaction for Pons and demanded to know what the matter concerned.

"I was retained to obtain some money for a lady," said Pons, with a bland smile.

"Ah, and you need someone with legal standing to witness it," concluded Jamison. "I warn you, Pons—no shadiness, no skirting the law."

"I defer to no one in my respect for the law," said Pons crisply. "I think, though, that until the matter is concluded to our mutual satisfaction, we shall just keep you in the adjoining room, out of sight. Once money has changed hands, I'll want you to meet Major Shaplow."

Promptly at seven, Major Shaplow rang. I opened the door to him and he came in—still as dapper and fresh as he had been on the train this morning. He carried his bulging briefcase self-confidently into the room, and, reaching the place where Pons sat in an armchair, clad in the Colonel's dressing-gown, he bowed with a decidedly military air that bespoke his experience in service. His eyes merely flickered to the table nearby, on which Pons had arranged the bank-notes, beside which I had put down my own cheque.

"I trust, Colonel, you've not changed your mind," he said.

"Never change my mind once I make it up," said Pons brusquely. "You've brought the agreement?"

"I have, sir."

Major Shaplow opened his briefcase and drew forth four pages, comprising two sets of agreements—one to be signed by Pons, one

by myself. He handed one to each of us and settled back to wait upon our reading them.

I read mine with care. Major Shaplow appeared to have left no detail to chance, for the agreement was plainly and carefully worded and incapable of misconstruction in any particular. It assured the investor of a twenty per cent return on his investment at the expiration of one year from date, or the successful conclusion of the pending suit against the National Shires Bank, whichever came first. Major Shaplow had already signed.

"This is admirably drawn up, Major," said Pons affably.

"Colonel, where money and honour are concerned, I prefer to leave nothing to chance—to avoid all possibility of error," said Major Shaplow.

"A commendable attitude," said Pons.

Thereupon he signed the agreements in a simulated crabbed hand and at the same time pointed to the money on the table.

"There is your money, sir. Three thousand pounds. Pray count it."

The Major went carefully through the bank-notes and examined my cheque as I in turn signed the agreements.

"Perfectly correct," said he, packing the money away into his briefcase.

"And the agreements, I believe, are in order," said Pons, folding one and slipping it into the pocket of his dressing-gown.

Major Shaplow flashed a glance at the paper Pons had handed him. He began to fold it, paused, and opened it again, his eyes glinting suddenly, his face tautening.

"Why, this is not the signature of Colonel Septimus Barr," he said. "I can hardly make it out."

"Ah, it is Solar Pons, Major," said Pons amiably. "I think your little game is up." He raised his voice. "Come out, Jamison."

Major Shaplow stood as if rooted to the spot, still holding the signed agreement in his hands, as Inspector Jamison came from the adjoining room.

"Inspector, I want you to meet Major Arthur Shaplow, one of the most accomplished confidence artists in all England. Major, this is Inspector Seymour Jamison of Scotland Yard."

With a single convulsive movement, Major Shaplow dropped both his correct poise and the paper he had been holding, swept up his briefcase, and bolted for the door. Unhappily, I had got up to come closer, and he ran full tilt into me, knocking me to the floor

and sprawling on top of me—and with Jamison within seconds on his back.

By the time I had recovered my breath, both Jamison and Major Shaplow were gone.

"The sheer magnitude of Shaplow's fraud beggars the imagination," said Pons on our way home. "A suit for seven million pounds against the National Shires Bank—with His Majesty as party to the suit! And the care and detail with which the whole thing was worked out! What a waste of effort! That fellow could have achieved higher goals had he put his mind to it. His extraordinary conception proves again that the more grandiose the tale, the more readily people are taken in by it."

"But the documents," I protested weakly. "Those stamps and seals were certainly genuine."

"Ah, yes, Parker—the stamps and seals were, but the signatures were skillful forgeries. The average Englishman does not realize how easy it is to get a document stamped at Somerset House. The forms are for the most part obtainable at any law stationer's; one need but fill them out, hand them in with the amount required for stamps, and the documents are duly notarized or stamped. The documents are seldom read. I'll wager that, if I couched the decree in the appropriate verbiage, I could tomorrow go to Somerset House and present you—as Major Shaplow did his wife—with a decree of divorce from Mrs. Johnson!"

"Then Mrs. Shaplow is not, after all, divorced?"

"That was the burden of my note to her."

"But how did you proceed from her divorce to the Major's colossal fraud?" I asked.

"Ah, Parker, you will recall my reference to an intriguing little note in Mrs. Shaplow's letter. You failed to observe it. There is not and never has been any such regiment as the Second King's Horse Guards. I was confident that any man who could vaunt himself as a Major in a non-existent regiment must be capable of even more imaginative ventures, and I suspected that 'the money' in the endless suit might be one of them."

## *The Adventure of the Innkeeper's Clerk*

WE WERE JUST COMING in off the estuary after a morning of sailing that day at St. Mawes, when Pons's keen eyes picked out a grave pair standing motionless on the quay.

"Is that not our landlord?" he asked. "And with a police constable at his side."

It was difficult to mistake that pear-shaped figure. "That is certainly Mr. Penworthy," I said.

Pons's eyes lit up. "I should not be surprised if our little holiday is about to be enhanced. A taxing problem after three and a half days of sailing will certainly not come amiss. Let us make haste."

As we came closer, Pons added, "Something serious has certainly taken place. I have seldom seen so grim a pair!"

The two men hurried toward us as we reached our mooring.

"Mr. Pons," cried our landlord before he had quite come up to us, "we've been waiting this half hour. This is Constable Liskeard. A terrible thing has happened. My night porter, Saul Krayle—" He caught himself, short of breath, and started again. "He's dead, Mr. Pons."

"Strangled," added the Constable.

"We found him an hour ago."

"At about half-past nine," said the Constable.

"Strangled in his bed. A maid saw his door ajar, and that was so unusual she looked in. Oh, he was afraid of something ever since the ring came," Mr. Penworthy went on.

We had now begun to walk back to the Seaman's Berth, the quiet inn at which we had chosen to take quarters during the brief holiday I had persuaded Pons to enjoy after closing the extraordinary matter of the Solitary Walker. The morning was gay with colour; the estuary was filled with boats, and across, on the Falmouth side, visitors to that part of Cornwall were already making their way aboard two well-known training ships upon payment of a small fee. Yachts had put out from shore, flags flying, and the scene was dominated, as always, by the cloverleaf castle of Henry VIII, on the northwest bank of the estuary. The thought of death was alien to the setting. But Mr. Penworthy, hustling along with some effort,

red of face and breathing heavily, and the taciturn Constable at his side, bespoke crime.

"He was a quiet fellow," said the landlord jerkily. "Never said much. Kept to himself. Never told us much about himself. He drifted in one day and asked for the job—wasn't concerned about the wages—and they're not high, you know how small the place is. Said, 'Anything'll do!' And he got along on it, better'n most. I hardly knew he was there. He stayed in his room quite a lot. And then one evening, when he came in to work—he was out that afternoon on the water—he had a little package waiting for him. I was there when he opened it. It was just a plain gold ring with some initials on it, that's all—but he stared at it and went all white."

Mr. Penworthy took a few rapid steps in a burst of speed and turned to look anxiously up into Pons's face, as if to seek there some clue to the solution of his puzzle. Pons's features were inscrutable, and he fell back again, resuming his narrative.

"Next morning he gave notice. 'Is it the wage, Mr. Krayle?' I asked. He said it wasn't. 'If it is, I'll raise it,' I said. He just shook his head. 'Don't you feel well?' I asked. He said he was all right. But I could tell he was scared. Scared stiff, he was. 'Is it anything I can help about?' I asked then. 'Nothing,' he said. 'It's nothing. Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Penworthy,' he said. Well, sir, next evening I took to watching him a bit, and he that was accustomed to getting on with his work and looking after the guests' keys was all eyes and ears."

"Ears, Mr. Penworthy?" asked Pons.

"Aye. He *listened*."

"For what?"

"I had no chance to ask. But I stood next to him, and I saw how he listened, and once he grabbed my arm and asked, 'Was that a dragging sound?' I said I hadn't heard it. 'What sort?' I asked. 'Like a man dragging his foot,' he said, and I saw how the beads of sweat had come on to his temples. And it's cool these October nights."

Here Mr. Penworthy pushed himself forward once more and looked hopefully into Pons's face, scanning it. Disappointed, he fell back again, and resumed his narrative.

"And that's how he was from that day to this. Two weeks' notice he gave, and his time would've been up day after tomorrow. Now all his time's up. He's dead."

"Strangled," put in the Constable as if he had not said it before.

"He had a fever in his mind," Mr. Penworthy went on. "That

dragging sound, now. Came out it was Mrs. Ruthven he hears. A widow lady on the second floor. Poor lady has a clubfoot. She's been at the hotel for six, seven months now, and Saul heard her walk all that time and never turned a hair. But after he got that ring, everything that sounded like a man dragging his foot or walking with a bad limp shook him up—bad, bad, Mr. Pons. What do you make of that, sir?"

He hastened forward again and looked up into Pons's eyes, his forehead wrinkled anxiously.

"The ring was very probably Krayle's black spot," said Pons.

The allusion was lost on Mr. Penworthy. He grimaced and fell into step once more.

"You have the ring, Mr. Penworthy?" asked Pons.

"We have it," said the Constable.

"How long has Krayle been with you?" asked Pons.

"Just short of four years. He came in 1920, the summer of 1920, I make it. The war had been over for more than eighteen months."

"You said, I think, he was out that afternoon on the water," said Pons. "Sailing?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

Mr. Penworthy stopped suddenly and gripped Pons's arm. He pointed off toward the estuary. "You see that craft over there? That belonged to Saul. There's not a handsomer craft in these waters."

"A costly boat for the night porter at the Seaman's Berth, is it not, Mr. Penworthy?" mused Pons. "Small wonder he made no complaint about his wage."

"Oh, he never bought that from what he earned, Mr. Pons," said our landlord hastily. "He had independent means. He'd saved a nest-egg, I took it."

"So young a man must have been on active service," observed Pons.

"He was thirty, thirty-one—something like that. He was in the war, in France. He let that drop one night when one of the guests came out point blank and asked him. A wonder it was he said as much, as tight-lipped as he always was. But here we are, Mr. Pons. You shall see for yourself."

We had now reached the Seaman's Berth, a quaintly weathered inn kept picturesque to attract holiday visitors to St. Mawes. A police-officer stood at the reception desk near the key-board only the previous night presided over by the dead man. All was silence when we passed through the lounge and made our way up the stairs



to the top floor, Mr. Penworthy in the lead, the Constable bringing up the rear. Another Constable standing at the threshold opened the door of Saul Krayle's gable room.

The scene before us was one of wild disorder. Central to it was the bed and Saul Krayle on it, lying with arms outstretched, his face mottled and blue, his mouth wide, as if he were still gasping for the air that powerful hands had shut off. The morning light entering the one dormer window cast a pale glow over the scene. It was obvious that someone—presumably the murderer—had searched the room in haste, for the contents of the bureau drawers had been emptied, the one chair had been slashed, and the mattress on the bed had been cut in various places.

"Saul got off at seven this morning," said Mr. Penworthy in a hushed voice. "He was tired then, and most likely went straight to bed. He always kept his door locked. It wasn't locked when we found him. Maybe he forgot to lock it. Maybe he opened it to somebody."

He continued to watch Pons's every move, as if he expected a miracle to be performed.

Pons stood for a long minute taking in every aspect of the room. I tried, as usual, to follow his eyes about, to guess at what he saw and what conclusions he came to. Krayle's body lay not in the centre of the bed, but athwart it; he might have been on his feet and been thrown to the bed. He was still clad in pyjamas; so he had prepared for or gone to bed. The condition of the bed suggested that he had been in bed, thrown back the coverlet, and got out again. The appearance of the body suggested that he had not been attacked while asleep. The dead face wore an expression of shocked surprise, as closely as I could read it for the agony in it. If he had admitted someone to the room, he must have been attacked almost at once.

Pons's minute of observation ended and now, ignoring the body on the bed, he began to carry out an intensive examination of the contents of the bureau thrown about on the floor, of the bureau itself, and of the clothing hanging from several hooks in a curtained alcove. Then he dropped to his knees and carefully examined the rag rug on the floor just before the bed on the side where one of Krayle's legs hung down. He picked something up between thumb and forefinger and dropped it into one of the little envelopes he always carried, and he found something more on the body itself to put into a second envelope.

"Eh, now, what might that be, Mr. Pons?" asked Constable Liskeard.

"If I had known, I would not have troubled to take it up," said Pons. "When I know, you will also know."

The Constable grunted and nodded in satisfaction.

Then, from among the things scattered on the floor, Pons picked up a yellowing envelope, into which he but glanced briefly. Yet he kept hold of it.

"I should like to examine this at my leisure, Constable," he said.

Mr. Penworthy looked anxiously at Liskeard's sober visage. "Mr. Pons is a famous detective, Liskeard," he said hastily.

"We'll want it by evening," said the Constable.

"You shall have it," promised Pons.

"We took note that Krayle was killed by a powerful man wearing gloves," said the Constable challengingly. "Did you find anything to the contrary, sir?"

"Nothing," said Pons. "I submit he was admitted by Krayle, who then walked back toward the bed—not to get into it, but to take up and put on his dressing-gown. Observe how it hangs, one sleeve still over the top, the rest crumpled on the seat of the cane chair where he had thrown it—as if he had picked it up and dropped it suddenly, surprised by his visitor, and, turning, was attacked and strangled. He would appear to have been so shocked and frightened by his attacker that he offered little resistance. But let me call your attention to his hands."

I craned forward. The dead man's hands seemed to be covered with an oily substance. Constable Liskeard also gazed at it.

"Smell it, Constable," directed Pons.

Liskeard bent and sniffed the nearer of Krayle's hands.

"It is not unpleasant," said Liskeard cautiously. "He must have put on some of that cream to keep the hands soft so much used now."

"I submit he would have been likely to rub it in a little more, if so," said Pons. "Let me commend it to your earnest study, Constable."

"Yes, sir," said Liskeard, his brow wrinkled in perplexity.

"What does it mean, Mr. Pons? What does it mean?" asked our landlord, literally dancing about in his impatient excitement.

"We shall have to wait upon events to tell us that, Mr. Penworthy," said Pons. "I fancy we shall know in a day or two. Can you

tell me now how many new clients have come to the Seaman's Berth in the past fortnight?"

"Yourselves, Mr. Pons—Major Andrew Grimesby—and but two days ago, a Frenchman named Noel Fromard. You shall see them all at luncheon, sir."

Pons turned to Constable Liskeard. "You said you are in possession of the ring Krayle received by post."

"Yes, sir." The Constable fished in his pocket and brought out a simple gold band which he handed to Pons. "This is it. Mr. Penworthy made the identification."

"Yes, that's it, Mr. Pons. A plain gold ring. A man's ring, as you see."

Pons was now examining the ring, studying the initials on the inside of the band. "S. K." There was nothing more to be seen on the ring.

"Not too long worn," observed Pons. "Perhaps five or six years." He handed the ring back to Constable Liskeard and asked our landlord, "Did you happen to see the package, Mr. Penworthy?"

"A glance is all I had of it, Mr. Pons."

"A pity. You cannot say where it was posted?"

"No, except that it came from France. I recognized the stamps. I've a hobby of stamp-collecting, Mr. Pons. But as to the place why no, I'm sorry, I couldn't see that, had no reason to want to. The box was in Krayle's pigeon-hole until he took it out, and I only glanced at it, nothing more. The post's not my affair, Mr. Pons. I like to think our guests and staff have as much privacy here as in their homes."

"If you've finished here, Mr. Pons," said the Constable then, "we'll need to move the body. And you can tidy up the room, Mr. Penworthy."

"Certainly, Constable," said Pons. "I want to ask Mr. Penworthy a few more questions, but perhaps he will accompany us to our quarters."

"By all means, Mr. Pons," said our landlord.

We bade Constable Liskeard good-morning and made our way back down the stairs to our quarters on the floor below, where we had a duo of connected rooms which opened upon a splendid view of the estuary and Falmouth on the far side.

"I need hardly tell you, sir," said our landlord the moment the door of our quarters closed behind us, "I am most anxious to have

this affair over and done with in as short a time as possible, and anything you can do will be most earnestly appreciated."

"I rather think Constable Liskeard is a very capable young man," said Pons, "but I shall be happy to lend him any assistance within my power. To that end we should know all we can about Saul Krayle."

Mr. Penworthy's honest face betrayed his unhappiness. He clasped his hands together and cried, "Perhaps it might have been better if I had been more curious! Now I think of it, we know nothing but the most superficial facts about him. A young man, who evidently came from London. . . ."

"Who had seen military service, had independent means, owned a sailing boat, and led an existence far more reclusive than is customary for young men of his years," added Pons. "Did he have references, Mr. Penworthy?"

"None."

"Did he receive many letters?"

"Very few, Mr. Pons. Now and then he sent off for something in response to an advertisement. Hardly more than that."

"Was Krayle in the habit of fraternizing with the guests, Mr. Penworthy?"

"No-o," said our landlord with some hesitation. "I wouldn't put it that way. He was always courteous and sometimes friendly."

"Did he have any special friends?"

"I wouldn't say so. Mrs. Ruthven seemed to hit it off with him well enough, but they seldom exchanged more than a few sentences at a time. He seemed to take to Major Grimesby, but I gathered that it was more or less a matter of mutual reminiscences of the war. And he seemed very friendly with M. Fromard."

"We shall want to speak to them," said Pons.

"That can be arranged."

"One thing more. Was any stranger seen entering the inn since the receptionist came on duty?"

"Certainly not by the receptionist, Mr. Pons. I asked. But, of course, the receptionist doesn't always stay at the desk. She leaves it from time to time; so someone could have slipped in."

"You were present when Krayle opened the little package from France and discovered the ring?" asked Pons then.

"Yes. I was at the desk. He came in from the water late that afternoon. He always came on duty from eight in the evening until

seven in the morning. He saw the box in his pigeon-hole, took it out, and opened it."

"Did he seem apprehensive?"

"No, sir. Just curious. When he saw the ring, he sort of tightened up. When he saw the initials on it, he went white. I told you how it was on the way from the shore."

"Indeed you did, Mr. Penworthy. I recall it," said Pons. "Did you not think it strange that Krayle was so much by himself?"

Mr. Penworthy shrugged. "Every man to his taste, I always say. Besides, what chance had he to mix? He might leave his duties for a few moments to look in on the bar or watch a game of darts, but he could hardly take part and still discharge his obligations to the house, Mr. Pons."

"You have seen this man for almost four years, at least in the closing hours of the day, if at no other time," pursued Pons, "and you must have observed his habits."

"Oh, Mr. Pons. He was a painstakingly clean man. He smoked a pipe on occasion. He never drank—though, truth to tell, I thought he looked longingly at the glass now and then." Mr. Penworthy chuckled. "But perhaps it was an old man's fancy. He read the *Times* every day and the *Observer* every week. When we talked together it was of sailing, political matters, the weather, the trade. I could say I thought him a Conservative but would that help you? I'll wager not. There must be some other way I can help you, Mr. Pons."

Pons smiled. "There is, Mr. Penworthy. When the police are finished up there, I would like the key to the room."

"What will the police say?" asked Mr. Penworthy anxiously.

"My compliments to Constable Liskeard. Ask him not to seal the room—if he means to do so—until tomorrow. Ask him to stand by until I send word to him."

"Yes, Mr. Pons," said Mr. Penworthy, backing to the door, ducking and bowing, and letting himself out.

"Now, then," said Pons briskly, suiting his actions to his words, "let us just see what this evidently treasured envelope contains."

He opened the envelope he had taken from Saul Krayle's room as he spoke, and began to remove its contents, piece by piece.

"Hm! A photograph of Krayle as a boy—in a Lord Fauntleroy suit," he murmured. "Discharge papers. Ah, he had reached corporal rank!—Two death notices, clipped together. Henry and Perdita Kraven. Evidently relatives, married—died a year apart. Coun-

try folk in Northumberland." He pored over the notices for a little while before he put them aside with, "Nothing here to suggest anything but modest means."

Next he brought forth a small packet of newspaper cuttings. Taking up the first, he read, " 'Escape of Two Burglars—A pair of agile burglars escaped capture after looting a flat in South Norwood last night. The two made their way to freedom over the rooftops after P. C. Leonard Worden slipped and fell while in pursuit. . . . ' " He took another cutting from the packet. "A listing of burglaries committed by the soldiers of various nations in the course of the war." He turned to a third. " 'Daring Burglary in Kent.' " The fourth was in French, which Pons translated—" 'Part of Famechon Loot Recovered. Some of the jewelry stolen from Count Gilbert de Famechon's chateau at Bordelais two years ago was recovered near the scene of an avalanche near the Swiss border yesterday. . . . ' " He took up another paper, shaking his head. "Yet another clipping about criminal activities, this time in England. Krayle seems to have had a fondness for the criminous." He rummaged through three or four accounts which were patently of a similar nature, pausing only to read another concerning the disappearance of a soldier, Charles Fenn, from the Swiss border. He went on to a briefer report. "An advertisement. 'Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Simon Kraven or James Fenn, late in His Majesty's military service, please communicate with Scotland Yard.'—The description appended would fit a quarter of all the young men in England, except for a shrapnel wound in Fenn's leg," he added, chuckling. Pressing his examination, he went on. "The photograph of a young lady. No identification. Very possibly a sweetheart. Another photograph, this time of Krayle in uniform."

At the end of half an hour Pons had taken from the envelope all it contained. The material testified to some degree of sentimentality on the part of its former owner, as well as to his interest in the criminous. There was an almost total lack of anything that might help an inquiry into the life of Saul Krayle.

Pons restored the papers and photographs to the envelope and put it aside. Then he sat for a few minutes with his eyes closed and his fingers fondling his unlit pipe, a meditative attitude I knew well enough not to interrupt. Presently, however, he opened his eyes and fixed his gaze on me.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

I chose my words with care. "It would seem to me that if Krayle

wished to lose himself, he might have chosen a rural village rather than a watering place."

"Would not a stranger in a little village stand out far more? I submit he would. You are then of the opinion that Krayle wished to leave behind him his former haunts and companions?"

"It would seem so."

"It does not seem to you strange that a young man, with much of his life still before him, should choose to lead a reclusive existence as a night porter at an obscure inn?"

"Far stranger events are commonplace, Pons," I said, ticking off a few of them rapidly for his benefit.

"True, true," agreed Pons. "Go on."

"He may have suffered a disappointment in love. Or he may have been the victim of traumatic shock as a result of his experiences in the war," I went on. "It took me many months to recover from seeing one of my friends blown to pieces virtually at my side."

"You and I both spoke to Krayle on more than one occasion while he was on duty," said Pons. "Did he strike you as anything but cool and collected?"

"No," I said reluctantly.

"As someone easily upset by a broken romance or subject to trauma?" pressed Pons.

I had to concede that he did not. "But these things do not always show on the surface, Pons," I objected.

"Very well. Let it pass. What did you make of his reaction to the ring?"

"It was obviously something he had once seen and never expected to see again."

"Capital!" cried Pons. "That is well put."

Thus encouraged, I went on. "Specifically, it was apparently not so much the ring as the identifying initials."

"'S. K.' " mused Pons. "They were his own initials. Perhaps his own ring?"

"A wedding ring—abandoned and now sent back to him with meaning he understood very well," I added.

Pons chuckled. "You insist on romance, Parker!"

"Why not? Though you are somewhat singular in this respect, I assure you it plays a major part in life."

Pons bowed in mock humility. But in a moment his smile faded. "The room was searched for something," he pointed out.

"Why is it that the obvious is always avoided?" I protested. "Robbery could have been the motive for Krayle's death."

Pons shook his head in disappointment. "Oh, come, come, Parker!" he cried. "It was evident that Krayle opened his door to his visitor. Moreover, the initialed ring was not taken. Nor was some fifty pounds in his wallet on the bureau. His watch was undisturbed. In view of these facts, robbery does not seem to warrant being considered as motive. No, the murderer was someone Krayle had no reason to distrust. He opened the door to him without hesitation very probably not long after he had turned in. His visitor knocked at his door between seven and eight o'clock this morning, murdered him, and searched his room—in such obvious haste that there was no time to restore the contents of the drawers before guests rousing themselves for breakfast might catch him abroad. What he sought was not, evidently, the valuables so ready to hand. No, what he wanted is not immediately apparent. It might have been a document—a packet of letters—incriminating evidence—or something of similar nature. It was certainly not Krayle's modest valuables."

"What was it you put into your envelopes?" I asked then.

"Ah, from the floor what appeared to be lint foreign to the room—of relatively little importance. On Krayle's body, however, if I do not err—I have not had time to analyze it, and I don't know that it is necessary—a drop of heavy face cream mixed with talcum powder."

"Wherever from!" I cried.

"Ah, that is a question to which I would like to know the answer. I suspect I may have it, but the circumstances at the moment elude me. But it is now time for lunch, and I suggest that we ought to go down and have a word with those guests whose company the late Saul Krayle did not find too offensive."

Accordingly we descended to the dining-room of the Seaman's Berth.

Mr. Penworthy awaited us there, and came to meet us, anxious to be of service.

"Mrs. Ruthven has come in for lunch," he said. "She's waiting to be served. Perhaps it might be possible for you to speak with her now."

"Very well," said Pons.

"But, I beg you, Mr. Pons, do not betray unpleasant surprise at



the sound of her voice. The poor lady has not long since had an operation for throat cancer, and her voice is harsh."

Pons nodded his understanding, whereupon Mr. Penworthy led the way to a little table beside a window, where the lady sat. I saw, as we approached, that Mrs. Ruthven appeared to be a lady of middle age, still hopeful of presenting the impression of youth, for she was not sparing of cosmetics, and her hair, I felt sure, had been tinted to conceal the grey coming into it. About her neck she wore a velvet band with a brooch on it, evidently to conceal the scar of her surgery.

Mr. Penworthy introduced us. Mrs. Ruthven, who inclined her head but did not offer her hand, gave no sign that she had ever heard of Solar Pons.

"If I may take but a few moments," said Pons. "We understood that you occasionally spoke to Mr. Krayle."

"Poor Mr. Krayle!" she murmured, pressing a handkerchief to her lips.

"Did he ever speak of his background?"

"No, sir. We spoke of little things like the weather or political matters we had both read about in the London papers. Mr. Krayle was such a thoughtful young man—very much like my late husband." She sighed. "I suppose it was that made me feel a certain bond to him."

If Pons was disappointed, he did not show it. He excused himself and we retired. Mr. Penworthy, however, now steered us across the room to a portly man in early middle age, a florid-faced, fat-cheeked, moustached man whose military bearing identified him as Major Andrew Grimesby.

"Heard of you, sir," he said, shaking Pons's hand vigorously. "Don't they call you 'the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street'? Of course they do. Harrumph! And not without reason. What can I do for you? Harrumph!"

Major Grimesby harrumphed after almost every sentence he spoke. He seemed to be happy in a sense of self-importance.

Pons explained.

"Oh, the night porter," said the Major, "Jolly good fella! Harrumph! Damned shame he had to die! Oh, I've been through it on the Western Front, Mr. Pons—saw a good many of my boys die—but this isn't war, you know. Harrumph! But I don't know anything about the fella. Fact. Never talked about himself. Just listened to me talk about myself. Ha! And we talked about the war. He was in

it. So was I. Ypres, Mons and all that! Jolly good show, what? Har-rumph!"

Major Grimesby was a complete extrovert, but of no more help to us than Mrs. Ruthven had been.

M. Joel Fromard was just entering the dining-room when we turned from Major Grimesby's table, and Mr. Penworthy's signal caused him to stand where he was. He seemed a little wary, but wariness was inherent in his figure—tall, muscular, broad shoulders surmounted by a rather thin, gaunt head, which seemed out of place on him. Moreover, he was young—certainly not over thirty-five.

He, too, had evidently never heard of Pons, but he listened politely to him and when he answered, chose his words with great care.

"I did not know the man Krayle," he said precisely in rather good English. "I chose this inn because it was recommended to me by M. André Fouyoid."

"He was a guest here," Mr. Penworthy hastened to assure Pons.

"Mr. Krayle spoke to me about France. He had fought there in the war. So had I. That was all. I know nothing more of him."

Pons thanked him and withdrew to a table of our own. Mr. Penworthy came along.

"I was sure it would be so," he lamented. "It is as I told you, Mr. Pons. Krayle communicated with no one, though he talked to many. But he spoke only of trivial things. 'A fine day, Mr. Penworthy,' he would say. Or, 'Raw morning,' and such matters. He said little more than the almanac!"

He saw us seated, volunteered to order for us, and then, leaning forward, pressed something into Pons's hand.

"The key to his room," he said conspiratorially. "Liskeard understands."

Pons thanked him, and at last Mr. Penworthy left us to our own devices.

We ate lunch in silence, since it was obvious that Pons wished to contemplate the problem of Saul Krayle's death. While we sat at table, Mrs. Ruthven finished and made her slow and rather awkward way out of the room. Major Grimesby, too, finished presently and strode away. M. Fromard, however, brooded over his coffee and a liqueur I took to be chartreuse; more than once his black eyes flickered toward us. There he sat still when we finished and in our turn left the dining-room.

Our landlord waited at the foot of the stairs. His eyes beseeched Pons to solve the mystery of Krayle's death without further delay.

"One of my guests has left," he said mournfully.

"I am sorry to hear it," said Pons, though his lips trembled a little with laughter he did not permit to escape. "Was he of long standing?"

"A month. Of course," said Mr. Penworthy, "he reserved only for a month. Still, one could hope, and I cannot help but feel that the thought of a strangler loose in the Seaman's Berth decided him against staying longer."

"Be of good heart, Mr. Penworthy. We shall do what we can."

We escaped our landlord and mounted the stairs.

But Pons did not pause at the door to our room. He went on up to the top floor and let himself into Saul Krayle's chamber, which had undergone a transformation since our earlier visit that day.

The bed had been made, the furniture had been put to rights as much as possible, short of repair, the contents of the bureau drawers had been replaced and the bureau set back against the wall.

"What can you hope to find here?" I asked.

"The murderer either found what he sought, or he did not find it. Let us assume for the nonce that he did not find it. Krayle had almost four years to conceal it, and the murderer scarcely an hour to discover it. I think it unlikely that he did so. We shall, then, begin—ignoring the bureau drawers, the bed and the chairs—with the alcove."

Thereupon, all the clothing hanging in the alcove was subjected to the most methodical search, rather more of the padding and lining than of the obvious pockets which Pons had searched previously. Pons took each article of clothing and subjected it to such careful scrutiny that I knew nothing could have escaped his notice. Having finished, he came back into the centre of the room.

There he stood for some moments more, gazing at each item of furniture in turn, before he flung himself to his knees and began to crawl along the skirting-board of the room, tapping it as he went and listening for any hollow sound. Slowly, painstakingly, he crept around the room until he had returned to his starting point without reward for his efforts. Nothing daunted, he then gave his attention to the window frame, to the walls, even to the ceiling—all without result.

Baffled, he stood back from the walls, and once again his attention went to the room's spare furnishings. I could see that he discarded the two chairs from consideration, as he fixed upon the bureau and the bed.

"The drawers were emptied," he said of the one, "and the mattress slit," of the other. "But a resourceful man would not be likely to utilize such prosaic hiding places."

He now dismissed the bureau from consideration and began to study the bed, which was of stout manufacture, three-quarter in size. It was of wood, and evidently of some age, with carven posts of a considerable thickness.

"Lend me a hand, Parker," cried Pons.

We set about taking the bed apart. Pons's object was, clearly, to detach the foot from the rest of the bed. Once that had been accomplished, Pons raised the foot of the bed and, to my astonishment, shook it, listening.

His face fell.

He turned the piece bottom side up, and at once his face lit up.

"These posts have surely been tampered with," he said with some satisfaction.

I pressed forward. The posts, which I had thought of one piece, were evidently of two, with a central rounded section framed in the square of wood that made up the outer shell of each post.

Pons produced his jack-knife, and began to pry away the central piece.

"Pons, that is vandalism on such an antique as this!" I protested.

"Tut, tut, this bed was never manufactured in this way. I submit these posts have been hollowed out and this piece is but the cork."

Even as he spoke, the "cork" came out. With it came a few strands of cotton padding.

Pons gave a cry of delight, turned the post bottom-side down and rapped it, all in one movement, sharply on the floor.

Out of the hollowed leg spilled jewels of every description, together with the cotton batting which had been used to pack them in lest they give out a rattling sound whenever the bed was moved.

"If I am not mistaken," said Pons, "this is part of the remainder of the loot from the Famechon robbery. I fancy we will find the rest of it in the other posts."

For a moment my astonishment held. "You knew!" I accused him.

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "It was a logical deduction, but not knowledge. Come now, let us repair this post and go on to the next."

In half an hour we had disclosed, gathered from each of the four bedposts, a veritable host of jewels—some still intact as rings or small brooches, but most of them obviously pried from their original settings. The bed stood once again as we had found it.

Satisfied with the appearance of the room, Pons withdrew, locking the door behind him, his pockets filled with the treasure we had discovered. We repaired in silent haste to our own quarters, where Pons spread the loot out before him and contemplated it with some degree of self-satisfaction.

"The central problem remains unsolved," I could not resist reminding him.

"True, but that is now merely a trifling matter of a little more patience," replied Pons imperturbably.

"You don't know the murderer's identity?"

"I am reasonably certain of it."

"Then why not take him?"

"At the moment I lack the proof to convict him. We shall wait upon him to show his hand. That he will almost certainly do, as long as he does not possess this treasure for which he did not hesitate to murder Krayle."

"If he knew, as you suggest, that the treasure was hidden in Krayle's room, why was it necessary to murder Krayle in order to get his hands on it? Krayle was on duty all night, and his room was empty."

"Ah, I submit that the murder of Krayle was as important to the murderer as the discovery of the treasure," said Pons. "Now, let us send word to Constable Liskeard through Mr. Penworthy, and ask the Constable just to step around here as unobtrusively as possible before dark."

Mr. Penworthy brought Constable Liskeard to our quarters just as dusk came down on St. Mawes, though he himself could not remain, since he had taken over the night porter's duties until a suitable applicant for that position presented himself.

"Ah, Liskeard," said Pons, "I trust you will be free long enough tonight to keep watch for the murderer of Saul Krayle?"

"If you know him, Mr. Pons, we should take him," said the Constable.

"I prefer that he deliver himself to us. Look here."

Pons had concealed the jewels in a stout leather pouch which he now emptied on to the bed.

"God's mercy!" cried the Constable in astonishment. "Where did you find them?"

"In Krayle's room," replied Pons.

He explained how we had come upon them.

"The murderer hunted this treasure," he went on. "He will be back again—before the room is re-occupied."

"In short, tonight," put in Liskeard.

"I fancy he will lose no time," agreed Pons. "I propose that we slip up to Krayle's room—one by one, if you please—and conceal ourselves there. You first, Constable. Here is the key."

Constable Liskeard took the key and slipped out of our quarters.

I followed soon after, and Pons came at last to join us in the gable room where Saul Krayle had met his death. Pons carried the jewels.

"Let us just surprise him," he said, and emptied the pouch on the counterpane of the bed. He glanced at Liskeard. "You are armed, Constable?"

"Only with my truncheon, sir."

"That will do. Take up your place behind the door. Parker and I will conceal ourselves in the alcove. The door may be kept unlocked, since, the room being unoccupied, the murderer may expect it to be. Now then, let us be silent."

We took up our posts, filled with anticipation.

As the evening wore on, however, and the night closed in, anticipation waned and the monotony of waiting took its place. The sounds from the inn below came more remotely than the ringing of bells and hooting of sirens from craft in the estuary. Through the partly open window the salty pungency of the sea invaded the room; it must have come in often before, for Krayle's clothes, which still hung in the alcove, were permeated with it to such an extent that all other odours were secondary to it. I was conscious there of small sounds which would have been lost in other circumstances—the clicking of a beetle in the wall and the patter of mice, which kept the stillness from becoming oppressive.

We had come to the gable room before nine o'clock; it was not yet midnight when Pons gripped my arm in warning to be particularly quiet. I strained to listen, and heard presently, as if it came from a great distance, the slightest of sounds—as of someone shuffling or

scuffing his feet somewhere; but it was more than half unreal, so I was utterly unprepared for the sudden beam of torch-light that cut into the room from the door, and fell, naturally, since the bed was in line with the door, upon the jewels on the counterpane.

There was a muffled gasp, the light moved closer to pause directly above the jewels, and a gloved hand came down into the glow of the torch.

"The light, Constable," Pons called out.

Instantly the light in the ceiling was turned on.

I had expected to see the Frenchman, Fromard, but it was Mrs. Ruthven who stood there, the torch already held club-like in her hand as if for use as a weapon.

For only a moment the scene held. Then Pons bounded forward, even as Constable Liskeard closed in from the wall. With a quick movement Mrs. Ruthven could not fend off, Pons tore the wig from her head, exposing closely cropped hair beneath.

"Let me introduce you to James Fenn, former partner and recently murderer of Simon Kraven, alias Saul Krayle," said Pons.

Fenn burst for the door, but the Constable was on him like a cat and Pons closed in from the other side to subdue him in a matter of moments.

"He had it coming," said Fenn in his natural voice, giving up his pretence. "He left me for dead and got away with the stuff."

"In the avalanche?" hazarded Pons. "You fought over the loot?"

Fenn nodded sullenly. "He wanted it all. It was the fight started the avalanche. He knocked me into it, saw me covered, and thought I was done in. Then he was off. It was true, I was near dead under all that snow and the stones, but I got out—a pair of country folk found me and took care of me—I was sick a long time, and knocked about pretty bad. Simon went to hide somewhere—but I found him—I found him!"

"And the ring?"

"I had it in my hand. Just at the end, when he toppled me into the crevasse that started the avalanche, I wrenched it from his finger."

His eyes dancing, Pons turned to Liskeard. "I congratulate you, Constable. The rapidity of this capture ought to earn you a promotion!"

"The ring, of course," explained Pons when we sat later with Mr. Penworthy, "was sent from here to France—and back to Kraven by

some obliging friend who very probably had no idea he was indulging Fenn's macabre urge to frighten his victim before he murdered him.

"The sequence of events seems eminently clear. Fenn and Kraven—very probably while still on military service—robbed the Famechon chateau, concealed the loot, and went back for it after the war. They fell out. Kraven attacked Fenn and left him for dead in the avalanche, but Fenn was not dead. Nursed back to health by Swiss peasants, he had only one desire—vengeance.

"Meanwhile, back in England, Kraven changed his name and turned up in St. Mawes, waiting upon the time when the Famechon robbery was forgotten, and feeling secure in Fenn's death—in the absence of any word concerning him in the newspaper accounts. He had another reason to hide here—Scotland Yard had begun to inquire for him, as well as for Fenn, though the Yard does not seem to have pressed its inquiry very thoroughly. I submit that the burglaries of which Kraven kept newspaper records were very probably the work of Kraven and Fenn before they went into military service.

"That Kraven came to St. Mawes with resources to draw upon was clear to you, Mr. Penworthy, since he had to have more than his wage to buy a sailing boat. But perhaps it did not occur to you that he could hardly have saved money in military service, and no doubt you concluded that he had inherited a competence. It would not strike you that he might have come by it illegally. It is a curious fact that the overwhelming majority of us regard crime as something that takes place beyond our immediate ken.

"Fenn, finally recovered and back in England, set out to search for Kraven and ultimately found him here. He disguised himself elaborately, as you saw, and took residence here, settling in even to the extent of striking up a conversational acquaintance with his victim. His wound was concealed by a simulated clubfoot, and his assumption of a feminine guise deceived even Kraven—though Kraven was certainly not on the alert for Fenn. Fenn had ample time in which to assure himself that Kraven had not deposited the jewels anywhere—how could he, knowing they were stolen and must certainly be listed with the police and the dealers who might be offered pieces from the loot? So they must be with him in his quarters. And so they were. Unhappily for Fenn, it had not occurred to him that Kraven might have hidden the jewels so skillfully that he could not readily find them in the hour he allotted himself."



"But who could have suspected 'Mrs. Ruthven'?" asked Mr. Penworthy.

"Kraven had time to reach toward Fenn's face before he died. His hands, you will remember, were covered with cream and talcum powder; this immediately suggested a heavy make-up, which left one with scarcely any choice but 'Mrs. Ruthven,' " said Pons. "A further touch of it lay on the body—enough to indicate that it was being worn heavily enough to conceal evidence of masculine facial hair. And, of course, our brief meeting with 'Mrs. Ruthven' was quite sufficient to convince me of her real identity—the injured leg disguised as a clubfoot, the supposed operation for throat cancer to explain 'her' husky, harsh voice, the clever artlessness of 'her' concealment of 'her' large hands in handkerchief or gloves. 'Mrs. Ruthven' was easy to take at face value—unless you happened to be looking for James Fenn. Since the data Kraven had kept was extremely suggestive, together with his fright at sight of a ring he had last seen in the possession of what he supposed was a dead man pointed to James Fenn, I was."

## *The Adventure of the Crouching Dog*

THE TRAIN had stopped at Chudleigh, and Solar Pons, chafing at every delay in our return to London from Cornwall and the puzzling matter of the Innkeeper's Clerk, had lowered the window and stuck his head out. He stood so for a few moments, looking up and down the station platform, his hands clasped behind his back; then he drew back into our compartment.

"You may think London is England, Parker," he said. "But it is not so. Out there is England—in a thousand villages and hamlets scattered across the face of the loveliest countryside in the world." He waited upon no comment from me to add, "At this point we are approximately two hundred miles and five hours from Paddington."

The guard's whistle sounded, and the train moved on.

Pons sat down after raising the window once more, for, though the October sunlight was warm, the wind that came in through the open window was chill.

We had hardly settled back for the remainder of our journey when there was a sharp rap on the door of our compartment, and a voice asked, "Mr. Solar Pons?"

Pons leaped to his feet and threw open the door.

A ticket inspector stood there with an envelope in his hands. He thrust it at Pons. "For you, sir."

Pons thanked him.

Standing with his back to the door, he tore open the envelope and drew out a telegram.

"So," he said, having read it, "it was premature to count on Paddington today." He threw the document to me. "I can hardly refuse Ramsey."

I read the message. "STANDING BY AT EXETER. PLEASE JOIN ME. HORRIBLE CRIME AT JOWETT CLOSE. RAMSEY." I looked up. "Who's Ramsey?"

"Sir Roderick Ramsey, Chief Constable of Devon. An old friend," replied Pons. "He must have telephoned Mrs. Johnson at 7B, and tracked us away from St. Mawes in the same fashion." He looked at his watch. "It can't be more than an hour to Exeter. Presumably he'll be at St. David's. We can only wait on our arrival there."

At the Great Western station in Exeter a tall, imposing man, whose most distinguishing feature was a fierce moustache, strode toward us as we descended from our compartment. He wore a rumpled tweed suit beneath a motoring jacket, and on his head a checkered cap; he carried a swagger-stick under one arm. His grizzled face, with his moustache and the bristling eyebrows, lent him the appearance of the popular screen-star, C. Aubrey Smith.

"My dear Pons!" his voice boomed across a hundred feet of the station platform. "Sorry, and all that—interrupt your journey—know how anxious you must be to get back to London." But with this he was upon us. He caught hold of Pons's hand and shook it vigorously, acknowledged Pons's introduction to me with equal vigour, and went on, lowering his voice only a trifle, "It's poor Larry Jowett—been done in—found him with his head crushed—all torn—some animal—horrible thing."

By the time we had passed through the crowd at St. David's and got into Sir Roderick's Rolls-Royce, Pons managed to stay our host's ebullience, and the account came with more coherence.

"You may or may not know it, Pons," began Sir Roderick, as the car drew away from St. David's and began to thread its way through the historic city of Exeter, across the Exe toward West Devon, "but Jowett had been out of England for two years. With Lord Carnarvon's expedition in Egypt. He was with the party when they opened the tomb of Tutankhamen, and all that. It sounds like balderdash, but wait until you've had a look into it. By my count, Jowett's the fourth man of that party to die, and I say it's enough to alarm a more rational man than I am.

"He came home in September. Jowett Close is an old manor-house on the northeastern edge of Dartmoor, not far from Throwleigh—about an hour's distance from here. It's a big place—once a moor farm—but you may know that country, remote as it is; it's high moorland country—and Jowett's wife lived there with the servants, his two younger brothers, and one of hers. Jowett was a wealthy man; he had to be, to support such an entourage." He shook his head brusquely. "But that's neither here nor there—the fact is, he's dead. Shocking sight, too. I knew him well. It shook me, Pons. He went out some time in the night and the evidence shows that he went for a walk on the moor and something tracked him; he began to run, it went after him, caught up, struck him down, and killed him. I've ordered nothing touched until you reached the spot. I lost no time tracking you down."

"So I see," said Pons dryly.

"I'm no amateur in these things, Pons," Sir Roderick went on. "What puzzles me is the complete absence of motive. And then Larry's going on—they tell me—about some sort of dog—a crouching dog, that's it—and the tomb curse and all that—and the look of his having been killed by some great dog! It's a bit unnerving. It needs a clearer mind. So I sent for you. What d'you think?"

"Let us just wait upon events," said Pons. "I'll want to look about at the scene of the crime."

"Naturally. A man can't do everything from an armchair!"

"Not everything," conceded Pons. "But I submit a man doesn't need to rise from an armchair to conclude that no dog, large or small, has as much motive for killing a man as one of his fellow men."

"*Touché!*" boomed Sir Roderick.

"One question, however," said Pons. "You said Jowett was wealthy. Now he's dead, who inherits?"

"I gather his widow does. There were no children. And his brothers come in for something, I have no doubt."

"And her brother?"

"Nothing. She'll have the best of his estate, and the living at Jowett Close if she wants it."

"His brothers, now. Why have they been content to stay there? I assume, since Jowett can hardly still have been a very young man, to be with Carnarvon's expedition, his brothers must have reached their majority."

"Well, one was studying for the ministry. That's Harold. He gave it up and came back to Jowett Close about six months ago. Hasn't shown any sign of wanting to leave so far. John's a bookish type—reading, writing poetry, that sort of thing. Just the kind of fellow who'd be glad of any niche to settle in."

"Independent income?"

"Yes, but small."

"Education?"

"Oxford, I believe. Both of them. Her brother's an older man, retired barrister. I've had a game of darts with him, but I don't know much about him. One of those taciturn, pipe-smoking individuals."

Pons nodded, and gazed thoughtfully out at the fleeting landscape. He asked no further questions.

In less than an hour we drove into the grounds at Jowett Close. Sir Roderick leaped from his car, beckoning us to follow; with instructions to his chauffeur to stay with the vehicle, he strode away

toward the moor. The manor-house, from what it was possible to see of it in our passage, was in large part very old—a low building of two storeys, with square towers of two and three storeys at some of its corners, bespeaking a conglomeration of architectural influences. It had wings projecting from both ends with several small outbuildings, and there were signs that other such structures had been removed long since.

Beyond the house loomed the moor. The hour was now high noon, but even so, the great expanse of desolate land, with its tors, its shadow-swept slopes and barren outcrops, a lone grove of trees to our right, was impressively formidable, and yet not without a certain wild beauty inherent in its solitude. Clouds had risen, and, driven by a high wind which could not be felt where we walked, crossed the sun from time to time, so that we walked alternately in sunlight and in shade, and the moor ahead of us was a patchwork of sunlight and swiftly moving cloud-shadows.

Sir Roderick walked with singular purpose, sawing the air at his side with his swagger-stick, his driving coat flowing outward at no more than the impetus of his swift strides. He did not once turn to discover whether Pons and I followed, which was fortunate, for Pons had gone off to one side, and was now loping along almost like an animal, hunched over, dropping to his knees from time to time, paying no heed to the comments Sir Roderick flung over his shoulder.

The manor-house receded behind us; the moor closed in, diminishing us in a world of sky, clouds, stone outcroppings, and desolate moorland. We had gone perhaps a mile in this fashion when, rounding a granite tor-formation that crowned a little rise in the tableland, we came suddenly upon a party of people, grouped together at one side of a covered form lying still in death.

Sir Roderick plunged at once into introductions—two constables named Warburton and Jones, a pair of photographers, Dr. Horace Annesley, and a harassed-looking man of approximately forty, whose name Sir Roderick brashly mispronounced—Anthony Heyle, who had been, said Sir Roderick, lowering his voice, “Larry Jowett’s old friend and legal adviser. And this,” he went on, “is Mr. Solar Pons,” at which he turned and for the first time noticed that Pons was only now coming up. He hastily amended his speech. “This is Dr. Lyndon Parker, and that fellow coming up is Pons—you see, he’s already on the trail.” He turned to the constables, gestured with his swagger-

stick, and commanded, "Uncover him—but take care how you step there—we'll want those marks undisturbed!"

Pons came up, his eyes blazing with keenness, his lips grimly pursed, just as the tarpaulin was removed from the body of Lawrence Jowett. Jowett was almost spread-eagled on the ground, lying on his face; his outflung arms ended in clawed fingers partly dug into the ground in his death agony, which could not have lasted long, for a great wound gaped in his skull where flesh and bone had been torn away, and below it, smoking-jacket, shirt, and vest, exposing his back and bloody, claw-like scratches deep in his flesh.

Pons walked delicately around the body, looking now at it, now away, at the ground around it. He bent to study the torn clothing as well as the horrible wound. Plainly Jowett had been felled by a single blow, seemingly made by a gigantic paw. Pons straightened and looked toward the physician who had been called to the scene.

"Dr. Annesley, would you say he took long to die?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Pons. He may not have died instantly, but it certainly did not take him long to die with such a wound."

"You've examined him. When would you estimate death took place?"

"Sometime after midnight and before two o'clock, possibly one o'clock. Rigor mortis is well advanced, but the night was chill."

"Hm! The marks of his running are clear. He began to run a quarter of a mile back."

"You saw the animal tracks?" interrupted Sir Roderick.

Pons merely nodded. "But what kind of dog—or other animal—would strike him so? I submit that this may be the primary question. I commend it to your attention, gentlemen," he said to the constables.

Sir Roderick struck his leg with his swagger-stick. "If you've finished, let's cover him, and get on with it."

"One moment, Sir Roderick," said Pons, as he bent and drew something carefully from beneath the clawed fingers of the dead man's right hand. "What have we here?"

He walked toward us, holding forth a stone, one face of which was engraved with a dog crouching above nine kneeling men.

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Heyle shuddered and said, "Mr. Pons, that is the seal of the crouching dog, the seal of the necropolis of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen."

"You are an Egyptologist, Mr. Heyle?"

"No, sir. Mr. Jowett explained it to me. This stone is only a copy. It had no value save as a curio. But Mr. Jowett had grown somewhat upset by the deaths which had taken place as a result of what he called the curse of Tutankhamen."

"Whose deaths, Mr. Heyle?"

"Lord Carnarvon's of a mosquito bite—Georges Bénédict's of a stroke—Arthur Mace's in New York."

"And now Larry Jowett's," said Sir Roderick, with a heavy sigh.

The constables had lifted Jowett's body and placed it upon a stretcher which had been awaiting Pons's arrival, preparatory to bearing it away, and Pons turned once more to the spot where Jowett had lain, bending to scrutinize it with the utmost care. He lingered longest at the place where the dead man's hands had clawed into the earth, kneeling there for a few moments, while Sir Roderick watched him with narrowed eyes. Only when he had satisfied himself that nothing had escaped his notice did Pons rise and rejoin us.

The constables, followed by the photographers, were already leading the melancholy way back to the house. Sir Roderick, Anthony Heyle, Pons and I fell into step behind them.

Pons walked for some distance in silence, his high brow furrowed in thought, his eyes fixed upon the ground. He carried his hands clasped behind him, and his lips, as before, were grimly tight until he looked up suddenly.

"You said, I believe, Mr. Heyle, that the late Mr. Jowett spoke with some concern about the curse of Tutankhamen. Can you repeat his words?"

"Well, no, sir," answered Heyle hesitatingly. "I can give you their substance, but, frankly, I didn't think them important enough to commit them to memory."

"Their substance, then," said Pons shortly.

"He recounted the deaths of the three men I mentioned. He seemed disturbed. Yet he joked about it, saying if any strange dogs were seen about the place—especially large dogs—he'd want to know in time to clean his guns. That sort of thing. Still he more than half believed in the curse."

"Damned queer business!" cried Sir Roderick.

"But you did not?" asked Pons.

"I fear, Mr. Pons, that the profession of the law demands more concrete evidence."

"He spoke of this matter frequently?" pressed Pons.

"What is 'frequently,' Mr. Pons?"

"How many times did he mention this?"

"Since he came home five or six weeks ago, he mentioned it, I suppose, once a week. It seemed to be on his mind, but he did *not* seem to be worried about it. It was something that interested rather than worried him."

"When was the last time, Mr. Heyle?"

"Only last night."

"Ah, you spoke to him last night?"

"I may have been the last person to speak with him, Mr. Pons. We were up late—close to midnight. We had been going over some legal matters. Mr. Jowett had many investments I had been seeing to in his absence. Then there was his will, in which he planned to make some alterations."

"Specifically?"

"He wanted to increase his brother Harold's share of the estate. Since Harold had gone into the ministry prior to Jowett's joining the Carnarvon expedition, it had not then seemed to Jowett that he would need as much of a stipend as John. Now that he had deserted this calling, it seemed to Jowett that he would need equally as much as John."

"So you spoke of this, and the curse of Tutankhamen cropped up again?"

"Yes, rather violently. I had tired of hearing about it. I don't have that kind of mind, Mr. Pons. I suppose mine was a professional reaction. In the end we had words about it, with Mr. Jowett becoming rather insistent in his belief that there was some pattern in the events which had taken place. Which was nonsense, of course."

"And you said as much."

"I did."

"As his solicitor, what is your estimate of Jowett's net worth?"

"Something over a quarter of a million pounds. Of this sum, his wife will receive two-thirds, including Jowett Close, his brothers will share unevenly, since he had not had time to change his will—John will receive two thousand pounds a year, Harold five hundred, and the rest goes to some of the servants and certain charities. He left a very clear and unambiguous will, Mr. Pons."

"If Mr. Jowett had lived to alter his will, would Harold's increased allowance have come from the sum allotted to John?"



"Possibly," said Heyle. "But I really couldn't say, Mr. Pons."

"Were the brothers aware that a change was being contemplated in the will?"

Heyle answered cautiously. "I should think they may well have been."

Pons retreated into silence.

The head of the melancholy little caravan was now entering the garden area of the grounds around Jowett Close. The scene had gone grey and sombre; clouds had closed over the sky, the sunlight was gone. Behind us the moor brooded darkly, almost menacing, like a great sentient being lying in wait, the tors like sinister sentinels wrapped in stony silence. Even Sir Roderick said nothing as we moved upon the house, until, at the threshold, he turned to Pons and spoke.

"Mrs. Jowett has asked to see you."

He led the way to the drawing-room where Sybil Jowett sat looking emotionlessly out upon the moor. She rose as we entered, and revealed herself to be a handsome, full-breasted woman, of more than average height. With that intuition so common to women, she fixed her lustrous blue eyes upon Pons and advanced to meet us.

"Mr. Solar Pons. I'm pleased you could come."

"Thank you. A sad occasion, Mrs. Jowett."

With one clenched hand she briefly touched her lips, then flung her arm wide. "Sit down, Mr. Pons. Sir Roderick." She turned on me.

"Dr. Lyndon Parker," said Sir Roderick.

She bowed.

"Pray excuse me," said Heyle. "I have so much to see to."

"Certainly, Anthony," she said, and, reseating herself, turned to give Pons her undivided attention. "If there is any way I can help you learn who killed my husband, Mr. Pons, please ask me."

Pons thanked her, but for a long few moments he sat in absolute silence, contemplating her and allowing his glance to flicker about the room, as if to note its appointments, and out the broad window opening toward the moor.

"Your late husband is reported to have spoken to Mr. Heyle about the curse of Tutankhamen," said Pons abruptly. "Did he speak of it to you?"

"I believe he mentioned it, Mr. Pons."

"Frequently?"

"I would not say so."

"It troubled him?"

She shrugged. "Mr. Pons, I no longer knew what troubled my husband and what did not. He'd been gone two years. He came back virtually a stranger to me. After his first week at home, he seemed to withdraw into himself, he was very much preoccupied. He gave me to understand that he was returning to Egypt some time in the future. But he did speak about the curse to Mr. Heyle."

"Ah. Mr. Heyle mentioned it?"

"No, Mr. Pons. Mr. Heyle did not discuss my husband's business with me. I happened, quite by accident, to overhear them arguing about it last night. They were in my husband's study, which is next to this room. I had gone to my room but came back here for a book I had been reading. So I overheard them."

"What precisely did you hear, Mrs. Jowett?" asked Pons.

"Oh, just a phrase or two. I heard my husband shouting something about a 'dog crouching at the door,' and Mr. Heyle trying to calm him down, saying, 'Come, come Larry—you can't mean that.' And, of course, the crouching dog is on that guarding seal of that tomb they found and entered in Egypt."

"You saw the seal?"

"My husband showed it to me."

"Was he in the habit of carrying it about, Mrs. Jowett?"

She looked at Pons with uncomplimentary amazement. "Of course not, Mr. Pons. My husband was a very methodical man." She paused and added reflectively, "I still cannot believe he is dead."

At this moment the door from the adjoining study was flung open, and a tousle-haired young man burst unceremoniously into the room, his dark eyes flashing.

"Sybil!" he cried. "Don't tell him anything. Say nothing at all. Do you know who he is?"

"This is Mr. Solar Pons," said Mrs. Jowett tranquilly. "Mr. Pons, my brother-in-law, John Jowett."

"I warn you, Sybil," cried Jowett.

"My brother-in-law has a flair for the dramatic," she said, almost contemptuously. "He has a writer's temperament. Do go on, Mr. Pons."

Pons continued. "Your husband was in the habit of walking the moor by night?"

"By day and night. Alone. As everyone knew."

John Jowett stood for a moment uncertainly, looking wildly from one to the other of them; then he turned and flung himself out of the room as impetuously as he had rushed in.

"I hope you will forgive him, Mr. Pons," said Mrs. Jowett quietly. "He's a creature of impulse. Now, I fear, he'll send my brother in." She smiled ruefully. "I am supposed to be helpless, you see."

The ghost of a smile touched Pons's lips, reflecting her own.

"My husband knew the moor very well," she went on. "And if, as they say, something pursued him out there, he could not have known what it was or he would never have run. He *was* running, wasn't he?"

"So the evidence indicates," put in Sir Roderick.

"My husband was not a timid man. He would not easily have run—even from—if I must put it into words—the ghost of a dog."

"Fact," said Sir Roderick. "I knew him well. Not a streak of cowardice in him. A brave man."

"Thank you, Sir Roderick."

There was a discreet tap on the door.

Mrs. Jowett shrugged her shoulders and called, "Come in, Hugh."

A man of perhaps fifty, bearing a marked resemblance to Mrs. Jowett, came apologetically into the room. "Are you all right, Sybil?" he asked.

Mrs. Jowett introduced him as her brother, Hugh Burnham.

"I don't want to intrude," he said earnestly.

"Stay," said Mrs. Jowett with an air of resignation.

Pons looked searchingly at Burnham. "Perhaps Mr. Burnham may have heard something in the night?" he suggested.

"I was in my room," Burnham said defensively. "I heard nothing. Nothing, that is, except the usual sounds—the dogs barking—and that hound somewhere, baying."

"When?"

"Sometime after midnight, I think. It woke me, to tell the truth. A sudden baying, the like of which I never heard before."

Mrs. Jowett gazed at her brother, a faint line on her brow. Pons's eyes flickered from one to the other of them.

"A hound, you said?" he put in.

"I thought it one, yes."

Pons stood for a moment with half-closed eyes. Then he said, "There remains another brother of your late husband."

"Harold," said Mrs. Jowett. "He's in his rooms in the southwest tower."

"I'll take you there," said Burnham.

"No need, sir," said Sir Roderick. "I know the way."

We excused ourselves and followed Sir Roderick, who strode from the room and led us to a corridor, which in turn took us to the tower, in the second storey of which Jowett's older brother Harold had his quarters.

Sir Roderick's authoritative knock was answered by the door's being pulled open from inside. A heavily bearded man in his late thirties stood on the threshold, looking at us for a moment with resentment.

"Sir Roderick," he said then. "Come in." He stepped aside, still talking. "I suppose this is a continuation of the official inquiry into Larry's death. I've already told the constable all I can say."

Sir Roderick introduced us.

"And what, Mr. Jowett, is 'all' you can say?" asked Pons.

Harold Jowett favoured Pons with a long, unwavering stare. "Mr. Pons, my brother was punished for what he did. He desecrated a tomb."

"I submit, Mr. Jowett, this is a matter of prejudice stemming from your early religious training," said Pons flatly. "Not of fact."

"Ah, you know about that. I wasn't worthy. Someday I may be."

The books lying on his settee included, I saw, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. He had been reading them, clearly. A glance around his shelves indicated that most of his books were of a similar nature.

"In regard to matters of fact," pressed Pons. "Did you hear anything in the night?"

"I went to bed at eleven o'clock. At that hour, to the best of my knowledge, Larry and Tony Heyle were just getting ready to go to the study to discuss Larry's affairs. Larry intended to return to Egypt, and Tony meant to try to dissuade him. I'm a sound sleeper, sir. I heard nothing until John woke me to tell me Larry had been killed."

"Mr. Heyle was frequently in residence here?"

"I wouldn't call it 'in residence.' He often came down at weekends. He was Larry's solicitor and handled his affairs. Jowett Close is a rather costly place and it was up to him to see to it that Sybil had her accounts in order."

Pons turned to Sir Roderick. "Who found the body?"

"Why, I understood that John found him."

"Yes, John found him," corroborated Harold Jowett. "John customarily took early morning walks on the moor. He writes poems, you know. He prefers solitary walks, and always carries a pocket notebook for writing. John came back to the house and

telephoned the police without saying anything to anyone—not even Sybil—until the police came. Then he told us.”

“Let us just have a word with John,” said Pons.

“He’s—difficult,” said Jowett bluntly.

“Temperamental—that’s the word,” said Sir Roderick, once we were out of Harold Jowett’s quarters.

We found John Jowett on the edge of the moor, sitting on a rock-formation, and evidently writing, for a notebook lay open on his knee, and he held a pencil in his hand. He saw us approaching with marked displeasure on his handsome features, and waited with a kind of arrogant defiance for us to come up.

“So now you’ve come to ask me questions,” he said as we came within his range. “I know no more than the others.”

“But you have definite suspicions, Mr. Jowett,” said Pons. “Some of which you feared your sister-in-law shared. What was it you didn’t want her to say to us?”

“I’ve nothing to say about that.”

“I see. You found your brother’s body?”

“Yes. I made sure he was dead, no more. I disturbed nothing. I gave no one else a chance to disturb anything. I called the authorities, then told the rest of them.”

Plainly he meant to tell us no more than he needed to.

A flush of irritation showed on Sir Roderick’s face, but Pons was not disturbed. He stood for a few moments looking out over the moor. A wind had now risen in the east, and the clouds had lowered, presaging rain. He turned to Sir Roderick.

“Before it rains, some attempt ought to be made to take casts of such prints as are to be found leading to the scene.”

“Even the dog prints?” put in Jowett sarcastically.

“Particularly the dog’s,” said Pons soberly.

“I’ll have it done,” said Sir Roderick, and hurried away.

Jowett grew more tense, as if he believed that Pons had deliberately sent Sir Roderick away. He waited, inwardly fencing with Pons.

“You write poetry, Mr. Jowett,” said Pons.

“Yes.”

“And, as a poet, you’re likely to be more than ordinarily sensitive to your surroundings,” Pons went on. “Your brother came home last month, and the atmosphere of Jowett Close underwent a change.”

“My brother was a man of action. Harold is a contemplative

man. And I suppose you might say I'm introspective. A dreamer, as my sister-in-law puts it. Would you expect that the invasion of a man of action wouldn't disturb the household?"

"His household."

"His household," repeated Jowett. He seemed disinclined to say more.

"May I see what you've written?" asked Pons. He held out his hand.

Jowett covered the page with one outspread hand. For a moment his eyes met Pons's. Then he reluctantly handed his notebook to Pons.

I looked over Pons's shoulder. "'Dark are the clouds that shadow moorland, tor,' " I read. "'And dark the deed that went before/In the night beneath the stars/Where hate and fury broke the bars/Of reason. . . .'" He had gone no farther.

"Mr. Jowett," said Pons, handing his notebook back to him, "did you, too, hear the hound baying in the night?"

"I heard what sounded like a hound, yes," said Jowett cautiously.

"And what was it that your brother did to disturb the household when he came back?" pressed Pons.

Jowett's eyes clouded. He slid from his perch, his notebook closed in his hand. "What you want to know you can find out without my holding it back, I suppose," he said. "He put out the son of our housekeeper because he thought he'd been paying attention to Sybil."

"Had he?"

"I've always been too busy writing to know, Mr. Pons," said Jowett, and walked away.

Pons made no effort to halt him. His glance followed him briefly. Then he turned to me, his eyes dancing.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

"Well, for one thing," I answered without hesitation, "somebody here has read that book by Conan Doyle."

"Capital! Capital! Your growing powers delight me, Parker. I submit there is not a shred of doubt about that."

"And the dog?"

"There was no dog."

"The prints?"

"Come along and take a look at them."

We walked a short distance out to where stakes had been driven down to mark the paw-prints.

"If you'll examine any two of them, you'll find variations between the toe prints."

"Wouldn't such variations be entirely consistent?" I protested.

Pons chuckled. "Certain variations would—but not invariably precise variations between the second and fourth, and the third and fifth toe prints. The variation, I venture to say, is precise. I submit that the prints were hastily improvised with some sort of garden tool that had but three prongs, so that the prints had to be made in two impressions."

"By night?" I said incredulously.

"We have nothing to show that the prints were manufactured by night."

"The dog was heard."

"John Jowett put it very well when he said he heard 'what sounded like a hound.' I suppose even you, Parker, could give a passable imitation of a hound baying. I suggest it is significant that the dog portrayed as crouching on the seal of the Tutankhamen necropolis, presumably the guardian of the crypt and the avenger of its desecration, is not a hound such as was 'heard' baying—a little detail this devotee of the Baskerville tale seems to have overlooked."

"On the other hand, if you'll permit me to play Devil's Advocate, it can hardly be denied that three members of the Tutankhamen expedition have died before their time."

Pons smiled. "Who is to say what anyone's 'time' is, Parker? It can also not be denied that the overwhelming majority of those associated with the Egyptian expedition and discovery are very much alive, in good health, and not to the best of our knowledge haunted by anything, dog or otherwise. More than a year has passed since the opening of the tomb. Surely a phantom dog could get around faster than that! No, this has all the earmarks of an impetuous crime."

"And, of course, you know who committed it?"

"Say, rather, I have certain suspicions pointing to the identity of the murderer. The suspects are obvious."

"Oh, that is certainly elementary," I could not help saying. "Let me list them for you. The young man who was discharged for paying attention to Mrs. Jowett—or conceivably, his father bent on avenging him. John Jowett, who might have lost money if his brother changed his will. . . ."

"Let us not forget the crouching dog," interrupted Pons dryly.

"But there was no dog."

"Yet someone desperately wanted us to believe there was," said Pons.

"One little detail you seem to forget," I said, "is that Jowett was unquestionably running from someone or something."

"Not proven," said Pons curtly. "The evidence shows only that he was running. Moreover, if you follow the footprints back far enough, you will find substantial evidence that two men set out upon the moor and only one came back. There is also evidence to show that one of them walked with exceeding care, avoiding any area of ground which might reveal his footprints. Further, there is good reason to believe that he also ran, but came back in the dawn to obliterate those prints at the same time that he made the paw-prints of the dog. This murder was carefully planned, if on the spur of the moment, by a resourceful man whom it will not be easy to get into the dock. But come, let us get back to the house. Sir Roderick is on his way out."

We met Sir Roderick at the entrance to the grounds.

"Have you finished here, Pons?" he asked as we came up.

"For the time being, yes. I would suggest that your men make a careful search of the gardener's quarters for a three-tined hand-tool used for grubbing, and have the grounds searched for a claw hammer or rock. Both, when found, should be examined for traces of blood."

"So that's how it was done, eh?" said Sir Roderick.

Pons nodded.

"Can you say now who did it?"

"No, Sir Roderick. I'll need a trifle more information which, I think, you in your official capacity can arrange to obtain."

"Name it, sir."

"I want to know in as much detail as possible the extent of Mrs. Jowett's expenses over the past two years. And equally as much detail about the income from Jowett's investments."

Sir Roderick looked narrowly at Pons. "I'll probably have to apply to London for that," he said. "Is it necessary?"

"I am convinced that it is."

"Very well. That will take a while as you know. We can't have that before tomorrow." He took out his watch and looked at it. "It's almost four o'clock now. I'll telephone the Yard from home. And, of course, I've planned for you and Dr. Parker to spend the night at my place."



Pons thanked him and lapsed into thoughtful silence.

At Jowett Close house, we parted briefly—Sir Roderick to pass along Pons's instructions to the constables on guard there, ourselves to go around to the car. As we passed the large sitting-room window opening on to the moor, we could see Mrs. Jowett standing there, watching us inscrutably, no emotion of any kind on her attractive face. Her right hand was clenched at her side, her left holding to the curtain at the window. She made no sign of recognition.

It was not until just after noon next day that a trunk-call came for Sir Roderick from Scotland Yard. Sir Roderick took the call in his study and came out to where Pons and I waited, looking puzzled.

"Something is wrong in Sybil Jowett's accounts, Pons," he said. "Though how you got on to it, I don't know. There's just short of forty thousand pounds unaccounted for. What could she have done with so much money?"

"Let us just go over to Jowett Close once again. I want to have another look at the scene of Jowett's death," said Pons. "You might send word ahead I'd like Jowett's brothers and Anthony Heyle standing by."

"Right!" said Sir Roderick.

In the car on the way to Jowett Close, Sir Roderick gave way to speculation.

"I've always thought Sybil Jowett a pretty level-headed woman," he said. "D'you suppose she made bad investments? Or worse, could someone be blackmailing her? Damme! she should have come to me!"

"At this point it is idle to speculate," said Pons cryptically. "I suspect that the explanation is not one that Mrs. Jowett thought might require your advice, Sir Roderick."

"Everyone here holds a good opinion of her," said Sir Roderick a little stiffly. "Does a good job of running her household. A popular woman, at home and outside."

Pons made no comment. His keen eyes were upon the landscape fleeing by, but he did not seem to see it, for he was looking inward and elsewhere, pondering Jowett's strange death. But there was in his expression a hint of suppressed excitement, as if the solution to Jowett's murder were within his grasp.

Once at Jowett Close, Pons lost no time in finding the two Jowett brothers and the late Lawrence Jowett's solicitor, who were waiting in the study.

"Mr. Pons wishes to return to the moor, gentlemen," boomed Sir Roderick. "Will you all be good enough to come along?"

The Jowett brothers seemed almost surly in their assent, while Heyle only looked at his watch and said, "I'm due in court tomorrow, and I want to take the night train from Exeter. Can that be managed?"

"It should not take us long, Mr. Heyle," said Pons.

He led the way out of the house to the edge of the moor, which was once again in sunlight and shadow, alternately bright and sinister in appearance, with an east wind blowing still, and occasional thin droplets of rain riding it.

"Now, if you'll all keep to my right," he said, "I will make an attempt to reveal what must have happened here two nights ago." He came to a stop. "At this point two men came walking on to the moor at an hour near midnight. It was a moonlit night, you will recall, and the sky was clear."

"Right," said Sir Roderick. "Clouded at sunset, clear by mid-evening."

"As it was in Cornwall," said Pons. "One of the men who walked here was undoubtedly Jowett. His companion and he walked a little way out on the moor. See here—and there—the remains of footprints, though some attempt has been made to conceal them, and who walked here with Jowett deliberately stepped wherever there was little chance of leaving prints whenever he could do so. Jowett walked along without thought of where he walked for three-quarters of a mile."

He fell silent, while a constable came up from behind us and whispered to Sir Roderick.

Pons went on for a quarter of a mile without speaking, then paused.

"Now at this point—as you can see by the staked prints, something happened to start Jowett running briskly toward the rock-formation ahead."

"The dog," said Sir Roderick.

"Ah, I think not," said Pons imperturbably. "Mrs. Jowett said of her husband—and you corroborated it, Sir Roderick—that he was not a man to run out of fear. Let us assume that he ran for some other reason. His companion was no stranger to him. They were walking here as companions of some standing. Let us suppose that Jowett's companion said something like this to him—'Larry, have you lost any of your hardness these past two years? Do you think you can race me to that tor?' So Larry ran, and the other after, taking

from his pocket the claw hammer concealed there, with which he struck him down."

Pons was now moving rapidly ahead. He came to the site of Jowett's death. "Now, then, let me call your attention to the imprint of fingers left by Jowett's right hand. Here, in the middle of the imprint, under the palm, the soil is disturbed—broken and pushed a little to the left. How came it to be so?"

"The reproduction of that seal he carried," said Sir Roderick. "When he fell. . . ."

"I submit that Jowett carried no seal," said Pons crisply. "Even if he had carried it in his hand for some obscure reason, it would not have made such a mark as this. No, this mark was made by Jowett's murderer who pushed the reproduction of the crouching dog seal under the dead man's hand, and then stood back and bayed like a hound, after which he completed his preparation of the scene by returning to obliterate his own running footprints, and manufacture the paw-prints we all see, by means of a three-tined garden tool with which he also tore the dead man's clothing and mutilated his body."

"We have both it and the hammer," announced Sir Roderick.

"But in God's name, why?" burst out Harold Jowett.

"Because he hoped to prevent your brother from discovering his speculation with his money, and to hide it forever by marrying your sister-in-law, Mr. Jowett," said Pons. So saying, he wheeled upon Anthony Heyle, and asked, "How did you lose it, Mr. Heyle?"

For a long, silent moment Heyle met Pons's grim eyes, while a fine line of perspiration began to gleam upon his brow; then he broke and began to run back toward the house. With a few running steps and a great leap, John Jowett brought him down. Harold Jowett was close behind him.

"Tony Heyle!" cried Sir Roderick Ramsey for the twentieth time as we rode through the late afternoon toward London in his car. "I'd never have guessed it. What happens to a man to bring him to such a pass?"

"The unlimited control of Jowett's money was too much for him," said Pons. "But I suspect that there was another factor. Sybil Jowett is, as you pointed out, Sir Roderick, an unusually attractive woman—and in a sense a dominating one, a mover. I should not be surprised to learn that Heyle's passion for her turned his head."





"You had your eye on him from the beginning," said Sir Roderick. "Why?"

"An elementary matter," replied Pons. "Heyle said that Jowett spoke of the curse of Tutankhamen 'frequently.' He said it 'seemed to be on his mind.' But he was the only one in Jowett Close who said so. Mrs. Jowett said just the contrary; yet if this superstition had preyed upon Jowett's mind, surely she would have been the very first person to whom he would speak of it at length, rather than Heyle, whose coldly analytical mind he must have known. They were, in your own words, old friends. So Heyle built up Jowett's superstitious fear carefully—deprecating it himself. But, of course, there was something more.

"When Jowett came home, he was like a stranger to his wife. He had treated her in rather a cavalier manner, had he not? But he could not have been home long when he learned that someone had been paying court to her. His first suspicion fixed upon the housekeeper's son; he ordered him from the house, however unjustly. He must have discovered how unjust he had been, and he must finally have learned that the culprit was not the housekeeper's son, but his old friend, Tony Heyle. There was an argument in the study, and it was doubtless there that the plan to murder Jowett was formed in Heyle's mind. What Mrs. Jowett heard was not a reference to the necropolis seal of Tutankhamen, though this was the context suggested to her. What she heard her husband shouting at Heyle was an accusation—that Heyle was the '*dog couching*'—not crouching at the door—which is to say, courting his wife while he was in Egypt. Heyle's, alas! was a fine mind destroyed by passion and greed. A pity his literary interests were not on a somewhat higher plane! That Baskerville tale was his undoing.

"An interesting problem, Sir Roderick. You may stop my train any time for another like it."

## *The Adventure of the Perfect Husband*

"ANY STREET in London is capable of offering an adventure in human travail," observed Solar Pons from the window at which he stood looking down into Praed Street. "It is extraordinary what a gamut of emotions the human face is capable of expressing."

"Whom do you see, Pons?" I asked.

"A prospective client, I fancy. A woman in her middle thirties, obviously in a quandary, and quite agitated. Having come this far, she is no longer so certain that she wants to go all the way. She may have chosen unwisely; her trouble would appear to be marital, if I can be permitted a long shot."

I came up beside him and looked down.

"Come, what do you say, Parker? You know my methods."

A well-dressed woman walked up past the entrance to Number Seven, turned several doors away, and walked back, once again passing the entrance, and, as before, glancing uncertainly at it. She appeared to be wringing her hands from time to time and was, clearly, as Pons had said, in her middle thirties.

"A woman of more than modest means, though not necessarily wealthy," I ventured.

A brief smile appeared on Pons's thin, eager face. "Elementary, my dear Parker. Would you not also say that she has not been too long married? Say—within three years?"

"Next you will be telling me she is having trouble with her mother-in-law who insists on spending five days of each week at her home," I said, not without asperity.

"No, I daresay she could handle her mother-in-law or her husband in any ordinary difficulty," replied Pons tranquilly. "Her marital trouble is of some less common kind. Surely the ring she removes from her finger from time to time, clenching it in her fist, only to replace it, can be none other than her wedding ring? And if she has reached her middle thirties without the need of a private inquiry into her husband's affairs, she would not be so agitated if she had been long married." He paused, leaning forward until his high brow almost touched the pane. "Ah! She has made up her mind. She is coming in."

In a few moments Mrs. Johnson ushered our visitor into our quarters.

With but a fleeting glance in my direction, she introduced herself immediately to Pons. "Mr. Solar Pons? I am Mrs. Lucy Kearton."

"My dear lady, I trust your little difficulty with your husband has not progressed to so serious a stage that you find it necessary to resume your maiden name."

"Forgive me, Mr. Pons. But I am so upset, and I have an embarrassing habit of falling back upon my Christian name. I have not been married long enough to lose the habit. It's Mrs. Robin Kearton."

Pons smiled and introduced me, assuring our visitor that she could speak freely before me. I observed that she was no sooner seated than she once again began to twist the wedding ring on her finger.

"It is odd that you should mention my husband, Mr. Pons. It is about him I came to see you. I hesitated for hours, but I knew I must see someone who might be able to help me. You must understand, Mr. Pons, that until this time I could not in truth have uttered the most inconsequential criticism of my husband's conduct toward me. We have been married now slightly over two years, and in all honesty I must admit that he has been a perfect husband. Last night however, an extraordinary thing occurred, and I cannot quite yet credit my senses."

"Pray compose yourself, Mrs. Kearton. If I can help you, be assured I will do so. I think I should say, however, that I am not in the habit of looking into marital difficulties."

She gazed at him for a moment in manifest distress, her lower lip drawn in and caught by her teeth. "Oh, but this isn't what you might think, Mr. Pons. I am not looking for evidence for a divorce; I wouldn't dream of divorcing Robin. You see, as I told you, Robin has been a perfect husband. I wanted for nothing; he has always been as attentive to me as he was before our marriage, when first I met him almost two-and-a-half years ago.

"Ever since our marriage, he has been punctual at all times. He is employed as an associate editor of the *Beekeeper's Journal*, with offices in Bouverie Street, and I could be sure enough of his return from the office to set the clock by him. Last night, however, he telephoned from the office that he would be detained over the supper hour. I could not guess what might be the cause of this change in his custom, but I did not ask, and he did not offer an explanation.



After he had rung off, however, it occurred to me that his voice sounded strained—it seemed to me in retrospect the voice of a man who was gravely disturbed but was trying his best to prevent anyone's noticing it. Mr. Pons, the more I thought of it, the more upset I grew. Finally, I called a cab and drove around to the office.

"But before I reached it, I saw my husband walking down a street with another woman. I was so astounded that I could hardly believe what I saw; so I had the driver go around and let me off in advance of where he walked, so that I could walk toward him and assure myself that it was not, after all, he. I had plenty of time in which to examine both of them carefully as they approached me; the woman was a complete stranger to me—very dark of complexion, almost swarthy, with black hair and something of gold or imitation gold in her ears. She seemed somewhat foreign, and had mean eyes, I thought. She walked with a swagger. The man, of course, was Robin. In view of my knowledge of Robin, I could not be mistaken; I would have been quite willing to believe that I had made a mistake, but the fact is, Robin has a very noticeable wen on his left ear, and while there might by some amazing coincidence be two people who looked enough alike to be mistaken for each other, it is surely beyond the bounds even of coincidence that both should possess such a distinguishing mark.

"Mr. Pons, I put myself directly in his path. I was not angry, but I admit I was bewildered and hurt. I expected him to be embarrassed, to stop and offer some explanation. But judge if you can, my utter astonishment to have him give me a little push and say, 'Please watch your step, madam.' That was all. I was literally rooted to the spot. I could not have spoken to save my life. I looked after him, open-mouthed, I do not doubt, until he was out of sight; by the time I thought of calling a cab and following him, it was too late; they had vanished, and besides, it was almost twilight and a mist was coming up. So I went home and waited for him.

"But he did not come until long after midnight, and I had gone to bed by that time. I tried to talk to him at once, but all he said was, 'Please, Lucy, I'm very tired, very tired.' And indeed, he sounded very tired; so, feeling confident that he would explain in the morning, I lay waiting for dawn, while he slept. This morning I asked him right out for an explanation. Mr. Pons, he denied everything. He said I must have mistaken someone else for him, that I could not have seen him where I said I saw him—in short, he treated me with a kind of severe stiffness which was utterly unlike

him. Mr. Pons, I am convinced that only the most serious kind of trouble would induce my husband to deny me. He does not know I have consulted you, and I do not wish him to know, lest he think I doubt him. But I must know, so that if necessity arises I can help him."

Pons sat for what seemed a long time with his chin sunk to his breast and a frown furrowing his brow. Presently, without looking up, he asked, "Mr. Kearton has always been employed in the offices of the *Beekeeper's Journal*?"

"Ever since I knew him, Mr. Pons."

"And before that?"

"I understand he was in the Colonial Service."

"Where?"

"Stationed in Calcutta. He returned to London about three years ago."

"A man of continent habits, I take it?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Very well, Mrs. Kearton. I shall look into the matter."

After she had taken her leave, Pons turned a quizzical eye on me. "What do you make of it, Parker?"

"Clearly a case of mistaken identity."

"What a pity you were not a police-officer, Parker! You have a distressing tendency to fall back upon the easiest solution, which is always to reject the premise. No, I think we have in Mrs. Kearton a woman of intelligence, discrimination, and determination. Such a woman is not likely to make an error in a matter which is one of such manifestly vital concern to her. We must assume then, that her story is true in every particular."

"Well, then, it is the old story—a triangle."

"Surely a most singular one, if so," said Pons. "Indeed, I might almost suggest that it is too unusual to be quite probable. Here is a man of the most regular habits who is suddenly found with a woman his wife does not know, and who not only by no sign betrays his wife's identity to the other woman, but denies completely all that has taken place. We can take Mrs. Kearton's word for it that her husband is in most respects a model husband; his actions of last night and this morning, then, are profoundly out of character. Why?"

"I defer to your judgment."

"I submit that Mr. Kearton is acting to protect one of the ladies."

"Elementary," I said. "Why not both?"

"I think if you will re-examine the facts, Parker, you will discover that this is no common triangle. Mr. Kearton is acting in what he conceives to be the best interests of his home."

"Indeed, and why should he not?" I demanded. "It would be in any case the indicated course of action."

Pons chuckled. "I think we might sound out Mr. Robin Kearton." He took out his watch and looked at it. "It is just past the lunch-hour, and I daresay he will be at his desk by the time we reach the offices of the *Beekeeper's Journal*. However, it would be as well if I undertook a few minor transformations, since it might give Mr. Kearton a touch of unease were he to see me in my customary garb; it is almost too much to expect that an associate editor of the *Beekeeper's Journal*, who would certainly be familiar with my illustrious prototype's famed monograph on bees, would not be likely to detect a slight resemblance. Let me see—a Hom-burg in place of the fore-and-aft, pince-nez, perhaps an ascot. Come, this will do."

We descended to the street, where Pons hailed a cab and gave the Bouverie Street address. Pons sat in thoughtful silence, his eyes half-closed, his lean face in repose. His chin was sunk in the familiar attitude, touching his breast, which was the sign of his preoccupation with the problem of the moment. I had no hope that Mrs. Kearton's puzzle was other than the customary unpleasant triangle.

The offices of the *Beekeeper's Journal* were a compact suite of rooms on the second storey of a modern building. Pons had no sooner stepped across the threshold than he became a fusty bee enthusiast. He inquired after Mr. Robin Kearton, and we shortly found ourselves ushered into a small cubicle of an office, which was occupied by a man of about forty years of age. He had got up at our entrance and stood, I saw, somewhat shorter than Pons, almost by a head, which made him of medium height. He was neatly dressed, but his cravat was askew, and his hair disheveled. He was not ill-favoured in looks, with sharp grey eyes, a thin-lipped mouth, and a Roman nose. He seemed somewhat nervous.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he inquired in a rasping voice.

Pons introduced himself as a beekeeper, and me as his neighbour. He went on to say that he was in search of an article entitled, "The Role of the Queen in the Swarm"; he was under the impression that it had been published in the *Beekeeper's Journal*,

but could not find it. A friend had mentioned Mr. Kearton's name—perhaps Mr. Kearton could help.

"I'm afraid you have come in vain, sir," replied Kearton. "No such article has appeared in our periodical at any time during the past four years."

Pons affected disappointment. "I shall have to look elsewhere, then. I am sorry to have troubled you."

"Not at all, sir. If we can be of service, do not hesitate to call on us."

Though he spoke earnestly, it was patent that Kearton was not anxious to detain us. Thanking him, Pons made his way from the building; in every gesture and mannerism, he was the picture of what he pretended to represent. Once outside, he did not call a cab, but set out on foot, his expression one of cogent thought. He did not speak until several minutes and several streets had been passed.

"What did you make of him, Parker?" he asked at last.

"He appeared to be somewhat agitated and preoccupied," I ventured.

"Yes, yes—so much was immediately apparent. And to such a degree that he seemed unable to remember that the article about which I made inquiry was published in the *Journal* seven months ago. What else?"

"I fear that nothing else of significance was evident to me."

"Indeed! For my part, I thought it obvious that he has not always been employed in this kind of position. His hands indicated that they had at one time been quite severely callused. Yet he was presumably in 'the Colonial Service,' according to his wife. Surely that is ambiguous, is it not? One hardly conceives that someone in 'the Colonial Service' should be doing menial work. More likely he was employed in some capacity other than that which his wife assumes him to have been; we are not told that these were his words. Very well. He was employed in Calcutta at some occupation rougher than his present one. A man of some sensibilities, so much is clear. His return to London is followed by his courtship of and marriage to the lady who is now his wife. She maintains that he has been a 'perfect husband,' to use her own words. Now, then, either she is right or she is not."

"She could have been deceived."

"You think him a man who could readily deceive his wife?"

"A woman in love," I said, "and later in life, at that. . . ."

Pons smiled. "Have you ever tried to deceive a woman for any length of time, Parker? I daresay you would not find it so easy as to justify your glib assumption. No, I think Mrs. Kearton has basis for her statement. He was in every respect a perfect husband; yet he did something last night which was grotesquely out of character. We are left to assume that if he reflects for her the same feelings she reflects for him, he was compelled to take the course he did in order to protect her from some knowledge he believed must be inimical to her or to both of them."

"A past robbery, perhaps – or murder?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pons, smiling wryly. "Those are harsh words, Parker. I should hardly have thought him capable of either. No, I fancy it is something a little more complicated. I should like at the moment to have a look at Mr. Kearton's bank account, and particularly his withdrawals of the past forty-eight hours."

"Blackmail!" I exclaimed.

"Ah, you are astute, Parker. We shall see. However, since that seems out of my ken for the present, I shall doubtless have to content myself with an examination of the past week's ship registry."

With this enigmatic statement he was silent. Presently he tired of walking, summoned a cab, and we were driven back to Number 7B, Praed Street, where Pons immediately lost himself in a careful examination of the ship registry of the *Journal of Commerce*.

Next morning, when I rose, I found that Pons had preceded me. He sat at the breakfast-table studying the *Daily Mail*, his breakfast half eaten and the dishes pushed aside. His ascetic face was intense, he fingered the lobe of his left ear, as he customarily did when preoccupied, and he did not look up at my entrance. Yet he had noticed me.

"Ah, good-morning, Parker. Just step round and take a look at this, will you?"

I did so. Looking over his shoulder, I found myself gazing upon a photograph of a dark-haired woman. The caption read: *Mystery Woman Dead in Thames. Is She Lilli Morrison?*

"An interesting face, is it not?" pursued Pons.

I agreed. "Black hair, swarthy – a half-breed, perhaps?"

"I believe so."

"Those are foreign earrings, too. Gold bands or bars – or imitation."

"Exactly," said Pons, chuckling. "Now pray cast your memory back to yesterday morning's visitor, Parker."

"Mrs. Kearton?"

"Allow me to recall her words to you. When she described the woman with whom she saw her husband she said—'very dark of complexion, almost swarthy, with black hair and something gold or imitation gold in her ears. She seemed somewhat foreign. . . .'"

"It would be more than a coincidence," I protested.

"No, no, not at all," answered Pons at once. "It is the natural sequence of events. It is she. I have had Mrs. Kearton on the telephone; she has identified her. I should add that she and her husband saw the picture almost simultaneously."

"Aha! And she watched his reaction!"

"You are leaping ahead of the story. She did. There was no reaction. But she observed, as he set out for the office, that his step seemed considerably lighter and that he had relinquished somewhat the burden which he had carried secretly since the day before yesterday." He pushed the paper away from him and got up, beginning to take off his dressing-gown. "I fancy another visit to Mr. Kearton is in order as soon as you have had breakfast—and if I am not mistaken, here is Mrs. Johnson now with your eggs and bacon."

Even as he spoke the pleasant, homely face of our landlady appeared in the doorway, followed by her plump person. She greeted me, as usual, and eyed with grave disapproval the remains of Pons's breakfast, while depositing my own before me. But, wise woman that she was, she made no protest, save for the sigh with which she gathered up the dishes and took her departure while I fell to with a hearty appetite.

Pons once more assumed the guise of the inquiring beekeeper of yesterday, and, so appareled, he sallied forth. "Unless I am much in error," he said in the cab which carried us to Bouverie Street, "we shall find Mr. Kearton a man of somewhat altered mien from the gentleman we encountered yesterday."

In this, Pons was not mistaken. The man into whose presence we were ushered this morning was an entirely different individual from the somewhat agitated and unkempt man of yesterday. He was immaculate in dress, his hair was combed, and the moment we appeared on the threshold, he leaped to his feet and advanced upon Pons with an extremely apologetic manner.

"My dear sir—I am glad to see you back," he said without

preamble. "I fear I did you a grave disservice yesterday when I told you that we had published no such article as 'The Role of the Queen in the Swarm.' We did indeed publish it, and within the year."

"I have it, Mr. Kearton, thank you," said Pons. "This morning, however, I have a slightly different problem."

"I am at your service, sir."

"It is something I am most desirous of knowing, if you can remember."

A faint frown appeared on Kearton's forehead, but he did not interrupt.

"This morning," said Pons, with the same dignified and fusty air, "I want to know if at any time on the evening before last, you observed anyone following you and the lady who was in your company at that time."

The effect on Robin Kearton was instantaneous. He had seated himself, but now he half rose from his chair, his lower jaw dropped, and the colour drained from his face. This reaction, however, lasted but a moment. He pressed his lips firmly together once more, sat down slowly, and eyed Pons with intent interest.

"You have the advantage of me, sir," he said finally.

"I confess I am more accustomed to a deerstalker and Inverness than to pince-nez and ascot, Mr. Kearton."

"Mr. Solar Pons!" cried Kearton.

"It is I who am at your service, Mr. Kearton. How did you pay the woman—in currency or by cheque?"

"I gave her a cheque."

"Sizable, no doubt?"

"Two hundred pounds. Yet not as large as it would have been had she known that I had married again."

"Your first wife, then. You were not divorced?"

"Mr. Pons, I thought her dead. She left me two years before I left Calcutta. A year later I received a note by the hand of the man with whom she had run away. He wrote that she had died in Ahmedabad, and returned an inscribed watch-fob which was my property. I do not know whether she had managed to deceive him by some means or whether she had been believed dead. My life with her was somewhat worse than hell."

"So I would have assumed."

"Enough so to make me appreciate Lucy. I wanted to spare her."

"I think, though, that there is now no longer any danger to your marriage from your first wife. I should lose no time, therefore, in

telling Mrs. Kearton everything without a moment's further delay. You paid the woman by cheque. I submit that in all probability she had not cashed it by the time of her death. If the cheque was found on her, the Metropolitan Police will shortly be around to ask you some questions. It seems inevitable that your relationship with her will be uncovered in good time. Quite possibly, before many days have passed, you will be arrested for her murder. Mrs. Kearton, therefore, should be forewarned."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Kearton in alarm.

"Let me remind you—I asked you previously whether or not you were followed when you were with your first wife."

"Of course. Lilli had someone keep an eye on us. A brute of a fellow with a scarred lip and a dark moustache. I took him for a sailor or a dock-worker, as I myself once was. She would hardly trust me, knowing what she meant to threaten."

Pons got up. "Very good, Mr. Kearton. Let us not detain you longer."

"I am going straight to Lucy and tell her everything. But if I may ask, Mr. Pons—how does it happen—" A light broke in upon him. "I see! I see it all—Mr. Pons, it was Lucy! Lucy came to you!"

"You are blessed with a most devoted wife, Mr. Kearton. She merits your trust."

"Indeed, I know she does!" cried Kearton, reaching for his hat.

"Now, then," said Pons, once we had returned to Praed Street, "I shall have to devote a little time to a more onerous kind of inquiry, and in somewhat less reputable attire.

So saying, he began to rummage about for the most disgraceful old clothing he could find. I watched him in silence for a few moments. He looked up, his eyes twinkling, and added, "I daresay it would take a hell of living with a she-cat to turn a man into a perfect husband, eh, Parker?"

"If the woman was what he suggests she was, I can't blame him," I said. "But he ought to have made sure he got his cheque back."

Pons laughed heartily, while he divested himself of his clothes. "What a wonderful trust of your fellow-men you betray, Parker! Between you, you and Inspector Jamison will have him in irons by nightfall!"

When Pons returned that evening, he was silent as to where he had been. Nevertheless, it was evident that he had been in Limehouse or Wapping, or some area close to the Thames and the



sea, for there was about him an indefinable odour of damp which is never quite dissipated for some hours after leaving the seashore, a kind of moisture which permeates clothing and thus heightens the natural smells of cloth.

He changed clothes and made himself comfortable in his dressing-gown and slippers. He assured Mrs. Johnson, who made anxious inquiry, that he wanted no meal; he had eaten and was content. She went back downstairs, lamenting that he was determined to starve himself, that he grew thinner every day—which assuredly he did not—and that someday she would find him emaciated in his bed.

Pons's amusement at this proprietary concern of our landlady was cut short by a sudden assault on our front door, the rattle of footsteps on the stairs, and the unceremonious entry of Mrs. Robin Kearton, pale, disheveled, and tearful.

"Oh, Mr. Pons," she cried, "forgive me—but they have taken Robin away."

"Do sit down, Mrs. Kearton, and dispel your alarm. Have they arrested him?"

"No—not yet. They've detained him for questioning."

"And the detaining officer?"

"An Inspector Jamison. Is it possible—do you know him?" she asked hopefully.

"My dear lady, I assure you Mr. Kearton is in no danger. May I ask—has he explained the circumstances to you?"

"He has told me all about the wretched woman. But he did not kill her, Mr. Pons, I swear he did not. I would know, if he had."

I looked at her with pity. Nor did Pons say anything further to her. He looked at me and suggested that I telephone Inspector Jamison and tell him that he might learn something to his advantage if he would step around to Number 7B. "You might add that it concerns the murder of Lilli Morrison. That will fetch him."

In less than an hour Inspector Jamison made his appearance—bluff and hearty as ever, his carefully trimmed moustache fairly bristling with suspicion, which was heightened at sight of Mrs. Kearton, who sat now, pale but composed, at some distance from the fireplace, where Pons himself waited upon Jamison.

"Pray draw up a chair, Jamison," said Pons. "Will you have a cup of tea? We have just been having some fine Darjeeling, Mrs. Kearton, Parker, and I. No? You know Mrs. Kearton, of course."

"I have the pleasure of her acquaintance," said Jamison, not without a faint trace of embarrassment.

Mrs. Kearton nodded politely, but did not trust herself to speak. She sat with her hands clenched tightly in her lap.

"I'm afraid, Pons, this time you're a little late," began Jamison.

"Dear me," murmured Pons imperturbably, "do not say so. I hope you have not given out anything in the nature of a statement in the Lilli Morrison matter?"

"Not yet."

"Ah, how wise to be cautious!"

"Pons, it is absolutely wide-open, cut and dried," said Jamison. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Kearton."

"Of course it is," agreed Pons. "But it is not cut quite the way you have cut it. Kearton did not murder Lilli Morrison. I concede that it was he who had the obvious motive, certainly; who would deny it? Not he, I venture to guess. But not even he would be so muddled as to allow her to retain the cheque by which you traced him. No, the murderer of Lilli Morrison is a man named Amos Sakrisan, a half-breed, like herself, first mate of the *Prince of Hyderabad*, scheduled to set out from the East India Docks tomorrow morning. He is a dark man with a moustache, black and unkempt, a scar on his lower lip at one corner of his mouth, and he walks with a slight limp. He is excitable and dangerous. He carries a knife and will not hesitate to use it just as he did on Lilli Morrison when he found out she had no intention of coming back to the ship which brought her here.

"You see, Robin Kearton was not the only man Lilli Morrison ran away from. He was only the first. Once back in London, she found Kearton, who thought her dead. I daresay it was simple enough to do so, since his name is listed in the telephone book at his office as well as his home. She telephoned his office, where she correctly assumed he would be. She meant to blackmail him and had no intention of returning to Sakrisan, who had brought her from India as his wife. Kearton, now married, knew that the pressure she could bring upon him if she found out how happily married he was would be unbearable, took every means to keep her from discovering his marital status, even to the extent of cutting his wife dead when he met her face to face while he was in the woman's company. Kearton saw the man who murdered Lilli Morrison in fury and jealousy, but he assumed it was some creature of hers, guarding her, to keep her from any possible harm Kearton might do her."

Pons turned to Mrs. Kearton. "I am sure, Mrs. Kearton, though Inspector Jamison has no time to lose, he can find it possible to see you home so that you will be there when your husband returns. I

understand that perfect husbands are an increasing rarity in our time."

Jamison came to his feet with alacrity. "I am in your debt, Pons." He turned to Mrs. Kearton, somewhat awkwardly, and offered her his arm. "If I may, madam?"

A month after the successful prosecution and conviction of Amos Sakrisan, Pons received an exquisitely carved plaque, showing a pair of doves in the traditional billing pose, surmounted by a queen bee and the initial "K."

## *The Adventure of the Dog in the Manger*

"NO, PARKER," said Solar Pons quietly, without turning around, "I fancy you will not find him in Burke. He might conceivably merit a few lines in some theatre directory. But it is a tribute to the energetic self-adulation and self-seeking publicity habits of the late Ahab Jepson that you should think of looking for him in the *Peerage*."

Despite years of experience with the astonishing deductions of my friend, Solar Pons, the private inquiry agent who has become known as "the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street," I had not learned to conceal either my surprise or my sometimes nettled admiration. I protested. "I've not spoken a word in the last hour. You can't even see me now. How did you know I was about to look up Ahab Jepson?"

Pons made a clucking sound of disapproval. "Dear me, these elucidations seem so needless. At breakfast you read with manifest interest *The Times's* account of the murder of Ahab Jepson, a minor actor on the London and sometime provincial stage. An hour later, you tossed away the *Daily Telegraph*, folded to the page of new plays in review. You rose and walked to the shelf where I am accustomed to keeping the *Peerage*. No other conceivably useful reference book is kept there. Surely it is most elementary to infer that the reviews in the *Daily Telegraph* reminded you of Ahab Jepson's murder and sent you to attempt the expansion of your knowledge in regard to the victim?"

"The paper's account was extremely sparse."

"I could not help observing it." He turned with a twinkle in his keen, dark eyes. "I doubt that Mr. Jepson would have liked his 'notice.' "

"You speak of him as if he were an unsavoury fellow," I protested.

"Not at all. He was hardly more than a troublesome poseur. Our American cousins have a most apt word to describe an actor of Ahab Jepson's histrionic pretensions; in both of its forms, it is a major item in the American diet. The word is 'ham.' "

" 'Troublesome'?" I repeated.

"He made trouble for almost everyone who had dealings with him. As the son of the distinguished tragic actor, the late Sir Hesketh Jepson, young Ahab conceived that he had a proprietary right not only in such plays as his father wrote, but also in his late father's

methods of delivery on stage, his ideas, even his gestures. Ahab, if I recall correctly, once tried to write a play himself—a poor thing, and alas! his very own. Surely you remember the number of actions Jepson instigated against fellow actors whom he accused of invading his proprietary rights by using gestures and methods of delivery similar to those common to his late father? He won none of them, of course, but he was no less a nuisance in chancery with his 'dog in the manger' attitude."

I took *The Times* from the newspaper rack where Pons had deposited it until he had opportunity to take cuttings for his vast file, and re-examined the notice of Ahab Jepson's death. It was little more than a bulletin and was so presented. It said nothing but that the body of Ahab Jepson had been discovered "hanging above the staircase in the family home near Stoke Poges," and adding that an investigation was in progress. The only detail appended to this brief statement was a sentence or two identifying the victim as the son of a justly famed and popular actor of yesteryear.

Pons watched me, his lean face agleam with interest. "A singularly barren account, is it not?" he asked, when I had finished re-reading it. "What do you make of it?"

"Obviously, there is something here that does not meet the eye," I replied.

"Ah, profound, Parker, profound," he observed with marked irony. "You will have noticed, too, there is nothing more in the *Daily Telegraph*. I submit that is a most uncommon circumstance. Not a word about the identity of the body's discoverer. Not a word, either, about the household. And did he have house-guests? One wonders. It was Sunday. I shall not be surprised if the police see fit to call upon Scotland Yard."

Pons's intuition was not in error.

Within the hour Inspector Jamison of the Criminal Investigation Department had telephoned to say that he was sending to Number 7B, Praed Street, Detective-Sergeant Peter Cobbett of Stoke Poges; he would be obliged to Pons if he would make such suggestions to Cobbett as Pons found possible.

The sergeant himself followed hard upon Jamison's call. He was a gaunt young man with a harassed air. He had a clear-eyed, honest expression, his straw-coloured hair was somewhat disheveled habitually so, it appeared—and his square-cut face was markedly freckled. Though a stranger to Pons, he knew him by sight, introduced himself without delay, and was in turn introduced to me.

"Pray sit down, and tell me what it is about Ahab Jepson's death that disturbs you so deeply, Sergeant," invited Pons.

"Inspector Jamison has told you, then?"

Pons smiled. "Not a word. I shall hear it from you."

Sergeant Cobbett thereupon began his account without delay. "There are certain circumstances about Jepson's death which are so puzzling as to be most disturbing," he admitted. "We have said very little to the press. That is not only because we know so little, but because what we do know involves some very prominent people."

Pons raised his eyebrows. The ghost of a smile lay on his thin lips, and his almost feral face betrayed the keenest interest.

"To begin with, the murder was reported to us on late Sunday night by a house-guest—Sir Malcolm McVeigh, whom you will know as the Shakespearean actor, discovered the body when he came downstairs at midnight for a book to read. That is, he allegedly came down for a book—permit me to put it that way. The body was hanging from a beam above the main stairs in a most extraordinary position, and we have not yet been able to ascertain just how anyone could have got him there. However, the police-surgeon reports that he had evidently been drinking; this may have been sufficient to have brought him close to unconsciousness; it is impossible to say. Certainly he was somehow placed in position. I should explain that he was hanging six feet from the stairs, directly above the sixth step, in the well of the stairs, which is broad and very gradual to the landing, from which it turns and goes on to the second floor, proceeding thereafter in similar fashion, though somewhat less broadly, to the third floor. The instrument of death, a chain, depended—and still depends—from a beam above the third floor, but appears to be fixed into the wall along the staircase there. There were other guests in the house."

"And you are considerably keeping their names from the papers," interposed Pons. "I assume all have equal standing with Sir Malcolm McVeigh?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons, it is so. The remaining three guests were Randolph Sutpen, Sir John Watkins, and Richard, Lord Barick."

I understood Pons's smile; any one of these distinguished actors would have been sufficient to make the story of Jepson's death one of extreme prominence—but all four at one time verged on the sensational.

"I'm sorry to have to add that at least one of the guests, Lord Barick, had a physical encounter with Jepson in the course of that

evening, and apparently all the guests were on—shall we say uncertain terms?—with their host.”

Pons looked over at the mantel clock. “A train leaves Paddington in half an hour for Slough. I believe we can just make it. No doubt we shall be able to obtain some method of transportation from Slough to Stoke Poges.”

“I can wire for the trap to meet us, Mr. Pons,” said Cobbett eagerly.

“Very well. Let us be off.”

He suited his actions to his words as he spoke, rising and divesting himself of his dressing-gown. He put on his deerstalker cap and a checked jacket, over which he wore his Inverness.

When we were seated in a compartment of the train bound for the half-hour run to Slough, Pons invited Cobbett to continue his account. The sergeant obeyed with alacrity, while the countryside flashed past and Pons sat with his sharp chin sunk upon his breast, and his eyes closed, listening.

“In addition to Lord Barick, the fingerprints of Sir John Watkins appear on a box of veronal capsules. There is evidence to indicate, Mr. Pons, that Jepson was given whisky and veronal to make him sluggish, so that his murderers could the more easily make away with him. He had not been well. He had asked these gentlemen to be his guests for the weekend, begun with last night’s dinner, because he wished to let bygones be bygones and to make amends for his conduct. We have the statements of the gentlemen, and two of them have produced letters from Jepson—identically worded—to substantiate that fact. All the gentlemen were in London, though only Sutpen was playing. Even he allowed his understudy to stand in for him and came down. All arrived just before dinner last night.

“Apparently everything went well until dinner was almost finished; then some reference was made to an action at law which had been lost by Jepson. The action had been taken against Lord Barick. There was an acrimonious exchange. As they left the table, Jepson, who had fallen into step beside Lord Barick, is reported to have said, ‘You didn’t deserve to win that case, Barick. You know you copied those gestures from my father.’ Barick struck him. The two were immediately separated. No apology was made. Barick does not deny the incident and is furious enough still to say that Jepson’s death is no loss.

“At or about ten o’clock in the evening, Jepson asked Sir John







Watkins to look at something in his room. Sir John's brother is a distinguished doctor, and Sir John himself had had some medical training before he went on the stage. Sir John says that he was asked to examine some sleeping capsules. He says that he did so and approved their use. There was then some discussion of cures for insomnia, and by devious ways the conversation carried on to some reference to an action brought by Jepson against Sir John, and, of course, lost by Jepson. There were words. A passing servant heard Jepson say, 'Were I more fit, I would challenge you to sabres, sir!' To which Sir John made this answer: 'Say rather broomsticks, Ahab. Those are your forte when it comes to battle.' Sir John does not deny that there were words. He was apparently the last person to see Ahab alive. His fingerprints appear on the box of capsules, which was sheathed in waxed paper; no fingerprints lie over his. Yet it would appear that Jepson was given veronal before he was taken downstairs and hanged. It is doubtful that one man could have done it. It would appear to have taken place shortly before midnight, according to the medical evidence; the method seems to have been that two or possibly three men carried Jepson down the stairs while he was in a stupor, and that they managed to lift him high enough to remove the Caroline Islands mask which was suspended from the chain normally, and hang him there in its place."

"Grotesquely elaborate," I observed.

"But effective," added Pons. "There are certain challenging facets in your account, Sergeant. Pray inform me—is it customary for the chemists in Slough or the vicinity of Stoke Poges to dispense sedatives in waxed paper?"

"No, Mr. Pons. That was Mr. Jepson's idiosyncrasy."

"Can the gentlemen account for their movements after ten o'clock?"

"All but McVeigh maintain that they were asleep."

"No witnesses."

"None."

Pons opened his eyes. He looked with intense speculation at Cobbett.

"Here we are at Slough, sir," said Cobbett.

The trap was waiting at the station. The three of us got in and set out through some of the most attractive country in the vicinity of London, hallowed by the memory of Thomas Gray, and long distinguished by the residence of Grote, the historian. The day was

pleasant for March, and the open trap an ideal conveyance, though Pons was lost in meditation and oblivious to the beauty of the landscape.

In a short time we arrived at the country home in which Sir Hesketh Jepson had spent his last years. It was a large and imposing house, set in the midst of oaks, interspersed with yews and ornamental shrubs. Entrance to the estate was by means of a gate set into the stone wall which went round it. A constable on guard at the door threw it open at our approach.

We entered a spacious hall and found ourselves at the scene of the murder, for the stairs were before us, the noosed chain was suspended there above the sixth step, darkly suggestive of the burden which had been removed from it before our arrival. The scene, however, was not without an aspect of the bizarre, for both walls of the hall were lined with the trappings of the days of chivalry—suits of armour, hauberks, glaives, jousting lances, helmets, and similar paraphernalia, all of which had been added to the souvenirs and mementoes of the late Sir Hesketh's years on the stage—the signed photographs of his companions of the footlights, of fellow playwrights, and England's great at the turn of the century; an imposing array. Various other ornaments decorated the walls, and the Polynesian mask of which Cobbett had spoken still lay on the stairs where it had evidently been thrown by the murderers who detached it—a great, colourful, almost gaudy representation of some ancient demon feared or worshiped by the natives of the Carolines.

"As a crime," I said, "it has elements which make it seem flamboyant."

"Could one expect other from the stage?" asked Pons, who had mounted the stairs and now stood looking upward at the chain, following its course to the great beam overhead and the extension over the beam toward the wall along the stair. "Or would you say it is unworthy of Lord Barick and his companions?" He flashed a provocative glance at me. "Is this not a most singular method of murder, Parker?"

I agreed soberly that it was.

"I can hardly recall anything similar among the little adventures with which I have been privileged to be associated. I daresay only a very determined man could manage to reach that chain. I measure it at eleven feet above the stair on which I am standing."

"That's right, Mr. Pons," corroborated Cobbett.

"Though from a few stairs up it might be possible to reach it in nine feet. At the same time the mask might bring it still lower. Presumably, then, it would be necessary to raise Jepson sufficiently to slip the chain over his head and tighten it on his neck. I observe there is an adjustable loop or noose there. Has anyone examined the chain?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. There appears to be some give in it."

"Indeed," said Pons, raising his eyebrows. "Let us just have a closer look at it."

So speaking, he ran up the stairs to the third floor, where the chain was in easy reach from the narrow hallway. He took hold of it eagerly and began to draw it in over the beam, where it was held in place by two iron rods.

"Ah, what have we here?" he cried. "The chain has been oiled." He looked at Cobbett keenly. "Would you say it suggests premeditation, Cobbett?"

"It would seem so, sir."

"Come, come, do not be so cautious."

He released the chain and turned his attention to the bolt to which it was fixed in the wall. The bolt was formidable; it projected just under the ceiling, and the chain was not just hooked to it, but appeared to be an integral part of it, emerging not from the rounded extremity of the bolt, but from the thick stem itself. Pons went cat-like down the hall for a chair and brought it back; he mounted it and scrutinized the bolt with attentive fascination, his sensitive fingers exploring the wall around it. Then he grasped the chain at the bolt in both hands and gave it a sharp tug outward.

It gave four inches, bringing with it not only the bolt but a rounded piece of the paneled wall, which fell back into place against the studding there as soon as Pons released it. He leaped off the chair, rubbing his hands together in pleasure.

"It would appear that this is not, after all, the end of the chain. We shall have to look elsewhere for it. Let us just glance into the cellar."

"We have been there, Mr. Pons."

"I daresay a return journey will not be amiss, Sergeant. Lead the way."

The sergeant obediently trudged down the stairs, one flight after another, to the main floor, where he went around to the kitchen, from which a stairway opened into the cellar under the house. With

the aid of the sergeant's torch, we made our way down into the damp rooms below.

"Just about here," said Pons, "we are under the bolt. What have we on this wall?"

"A cupboard," offered Cobbett.

"So the eye sees it. But the eye is limited by the surface, is it not so?"

As he spoke, he opened the cupboard and disclosed shelving bearing narrow rows of jam and marmalade pots. I was so injudicious as to smile. Pons's serenity was undisturbed.

"Some of the country virtues have survived the war, I see," he said. "But I submit that a cupboard tall enough and deep enough to hold two or three men must contain something more than a single row of jam-jars."

He was already working at the shelving, moving the jars about to peer behind them; but, not satisfied, he seized hold of the shelf and pulled it back. It receded from its depth, six inches or thereabouts, and held there. He gave it an experimental push away from the outer side wall of the cupboard, and it slid noiselessly into place behind the shelving which looked out of the other door of the cupboard. In doing so, it disclosed a space recessed from the cupboard into the wall at that point, and harbouring an ordinary winch, fixed to a concrete block. Around the winch was wound a section of chain, one end of which reached tautly upward, the other end being bolted to the concrete. There were several devices attached to the winch suggesting automatic mechanism of some kind.

Pons stepped into the aperture thus revealed and, moving into the wall space, looked upward.

"The chain reaches to the third floor without obstruction," he announced. "Just as I thought. The floor has been cut away widely enough to allow for ease of passage, and the chain is fixed between the joists."

He gave his attention then to the mechanism. After studying it for a few moments in silence, his keen eyes twinkling with fascinated appreciation, he turned the winch by its handle and unwound the chain; it unwound but eight feet, no farther. Then he wound it up once more; it wound up only the eight feet he had unwound it. He examined the automatic device, unwound the chain once more, set the device, and gave a sharp tug at the taut end of the chain. Instantly the device whirled, the winch moved, and the chain wound itself up once more.

"Capital! Capital!" exclaimed Pons delightedly. "Now you will have observed, Sergeant, that one man could very well effectively have hanged Jepson. All he need have done was to unwind the chain, thus letting it down to within easy reach of the steps, slip the noose over Jepson's neck, and pull at the chain sufficiently to start the mechanism. Let us just set it once more and test it for ourselves."

Accordingly, he did so. Then the three of us returned to the main hall. The chain had been lowered, as Pons had foreseen; it hung now only three feet above the sixth stair. Pons looked upward into the gloom of the ceiling at the far end of the stairwell; nothing of the false bolt with its circular piece of the wood paneling was visible in that murk, quite possibly because it was in the shadow of the great beam over which the chain passed. He mounted the stairs, grasped the chain in both hands, and gave it a sharp tug; the chain moved steadily back into its former position eleven feet above the stairs. Only a sharp ear could have heard the sound of the winch below.

Detective-Sergeant Cobbett stared hard at the chain. "Well, all I can say, sir—only an actor would have worked out something like that!"

"Quite right," agreed Pons.

"It would have been simpler to dispatch him almost any other way."

"But not nearly so effective," replied Pons instantly. "And actors are notoriously fond of their entrances and exits." He favoured me with an enigmatic, almost sly glance. "Would you not be inclined to say, Parker, that a good entrance or a good exit more adequately affords us the measure of the actor than any given set of lines?"

I agreed that it was so.

"Now then," Pons continued, "we shall need to examine the problem of how the veronal was administered."

"Evidence indicates that it was given to him in whisky and soda, sir," said Cobbett. "Perhaps you would like to examine Jepson's room? We've left it precisely as it was found."

In Jepson's room, too, a constable was on guard. Cobbett instructed him to stand before the door while we were in the room. The room itself was decorated with all manner of heraldic emblems, oddly mingled with Polynesian masks, considerably smaller than the one which had customarily hung from the chain over the stairs. The bed was a canopied four-poster, an obviously old piece

of furniture; it had been turned back, in readiness for occupancy, but it had not been occupied. There was some evidence to show that someone had sat on one end of it.

Pons glanced only cursorily at the room in general, his eyes lingered a few moments on the bed, darting here and there, from pillows to posts, and then he gave his undivided attention to the dressing-table beside the bed. A decanter of whisky, a soda-water bottle, and two glasses stood there; two brushes had been pushed back to make room for the tray on which the bottles and glasses stood.

"We have impounded the box of veronal, of course," explained the sergeant.

"How many capsules did it contain?" inquired Pons.

"Eight. It was made to contain twelve. He had just bought it at Henderson's in Slough the day before yesterday. He was evidently given four of them."

"Sir John Watkins has been questioned in regard to these glasses?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. He says that he had one drink with Jepson, while Jepson had three. His prints are on both glasses. He says that he handed Jepson's glass to him; he was closer to the tray and Jepson asked him to fill his glass a third time. It was then that the argument began, says Sir John."

"And where were the servants all this time?"

"There are only two—a cook and a man-servant. They are man and wife, and live in a cottage three miles away. They spend their nights there, traveling to and from the house by dog cart when Mr. Jepson is in residence. They were gone last night. Jepson had permitted them to go some time after ten o'clock, as usual."

Pons nodded absently. Quite clearly he had no further interest in Jepson's house-guests. He displayed a marked disinterest in interrogating them, but instead walked back down the stairs and stood looking once more at the bizarre setting for Jepson's murder.

"Do you remember Randolph Sutpen's melodrama, *The Four Who Returned*, Parker?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, a little."

"Does not something about this situation remind you of the central situation in that drama? Was it not concerned with four men who 'executed' a fifth?"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed. "So it was. And Sutpen is one of the guests."

"And suspects," added Pons. "I believe, Sergeant, we shall now have to talk to them. I take it they are available."

"Yes, sir. They are in the library, to the right, sir."

The guests came to their feet as we entered the study. All four were between forty and sixty, and they shared one quality in common—all had what is known in the parlance of the theatre as "presence." They were distinguished in appearance, and at the moment of our entrance, as they rose and ranged themselves together, like a phalanx against us, they had a most formidable aspect.

"Pray compose yourselves, gentlemen," said Pons. "I must trouble you with but a few questions."

"We are at your service, Mr. Pons," said Lord Barick, a tall, broad-shouldered man with impressive eyes and mouth. "We trust that this problem can be solved with your usual ingenuity."

"I thank your lordship. Please sit down."

As they did so, Pons took his stand against the mantel at the fireplace, facing them. "First of all," he continued, "there is the question of the letter. Does any of you have his letter with him?"

"I do, sir," said Sutpen, the youngest of the four, and, like all the others, a man of evident physical strength. He handed an envelope to Pons.

While Pons opened it and removed the invitation from it, I could not but reflect upon the fact that men who looked less like actors and more like cricketers could not readily be conceived. Any one of them appeared fully capable of carrying the not inconsiderable body of Ahab Jepson up and down his stairs with ease.

Pons read, interjecting comments. "'I take the liberty of imploring you, for the sake of my dead father's memory'—a maudlin touch—'to give me the opportunity to make the amends that are due you'—He is not above being ambiguous!—'and be my house-guest for the last weekend in March. There are matters which sorely need adjustment'—How delicate he is!—'and I welcome the opportunity of adjusting them. I trust you will let bygones be bygones and do me the honour of being my guest.'"

He handed the letter back to Sutpen. "This role did not fit Ahab Jepson well—yet it is singularly in character—florid, pompous, vain, and wholly fraudulent. I take it, gentlemen, that Mr. Jepson's conduct was basically unchanged."

"That is correct, Mr. Pons," replied Lord Barick.

Pons turned to Sir John Watkins, the shortest of the four, though



a sturdy, well-muscled man. "You, Sir John, were asked to examine a box of veronal capsules. How many were in the box at the time you looked into it?"

"Eight," replied Sir John without hesitation, his dark eyes flashing.

"When were you last previously a guest here, Sir John?"

"This is the first time I've entered the house since Hesketh Jepson's death."

"That was fifteen years ago on the twentieth of May. Has any of you been here since that time prior to this visit?"

None of them had. Sutpen volunteered the additional information that he alone among the four of them had never previously visited the house; he had known Sir Hesketh only in the last two years of the actor's life.

"Will you think back to your last visit, Sir John?" suggested Pons.

"Yes?"

"Can you recall any signal differences in the appearance of the house?"

Sir John smiled grimly. "Sir Hesketh would hardly have tolerated the gewgaws Ahab collected. I mean that though he came from a distinguished family, he had none but family heirlooms about; Ahab went in for all manner of chivalric paraphernalia, and added a line of Polynesian carvings. I am constrained to suggest that the former appealed to him as compensation for his own lack, and the latter to the essentially primitive aspects of his mind."

"Let us not speak ill of the dead," said Sir Malcolm McVeigh quietly. He was the oldest of the group, with greying hair, and wore a monocle in his right eye. He had an impressively reassuring manner.

Pons turned and looked at him, and without changing the direction of his glance, said, "Now I should like a detailed account of your movements between the time you entered the house yesterday and the discovery of Jepson's body." He spoke with a casual air which suggested that this was only a formality to be got over with.

"I believe I can speak for all of us," offered Sir Malcolm, returning Pons's gaze with an attitude of easy confidence. "We arrived together, you see, and we remained pretty much together throughout the evening. We were shown into this study on our arrival, while our things were packed off upstairs to our rooms. Our host appeared, greeted us pleasantly enough, and himself showed us

to our rooms. We were not left any longer than the time it took us to get ready for dinner. Then our host himself led us down to the dining-room. On the way he stopped on the stairs to deliver a lecture about the mask hung there; it purports to be a mask worn by witch-doctors in summoning up the dead—a macabre conceit which seemed to please him. Then we went in to dinner. I believe you have heard already of the disagreeable conversations which were carried on at the table; our host took the occasion to reveal his true colours; with each drink he took, he became more offensive. After dinner we sat for over an hour in the study. Let me see—dinner took until some time after eight; I believe we left the study for our own rooms at nine-forty-five or thereabouts. It was while we were on the way to our rooms that our host asked Sir John to his room.

“As for the rest of us—we went to our own rooms but shortly foregathered in Lord Barick’s quarters to discuss our host’s aberrant conduct. We were joined there by Sir John, much agitated, in perhaps an hour’s time. Lord Barick was preparing for bed by the time we left him. We went on to Mr. Sutpen’s room, spoke about his play, and left him disrobing. Sir John sat for a while in my room, still angry at what he termed our host’s insolence. I recalled an incident on one of my early visits to Sir Hesketh, when he was obliged to cane Ahab for his insolence, though Ahab was then but a boy. It was eleven o’clock when we parted. Sir John presumably retired. Only I failed to do so; I was myself so upset that I could not sleep. This was in part because at least two members of the party—Sir John and Lord Barick—had not wished to respond to our host’s invitation, but I prevailed upon them to come, thinking that perhaps Ahab had had a change of heart or conscience. I walked about or sat in my room until midnight or thereabouts; then I gave up trying and went downstairs. I found Ahab.”

Pons had listened carefully during this recital. At its conclusion he glanced from one to another of the other three men, but none volunteered additional information. “Did you hear any suspicious sounds during the hour you were awake before you went downstairs?” he asked then.

“Mr. Pons, I heard nothing.”

“Not even, let me suggest, the closing of a door?”

“I do not remember that I did.”

“Now, gentlemen, I want you to listen very carefully. Pray excuse me; I will return in a few moments.”

Pons left the room.

He was gone only a short time. Just before he stepped back into the room, I heard the distant grinding of the winch; he had evidently set off the mechanism. It was remote even from this floor, which was directly above the cellar; from the second storey it would scarcely have been audible.

"Did you hear anything now, Sir Malcolm?" asked Pons.

"Something creaked?"

"What would you say it was?"

"A pump, perhaps?" ventured Sir Malcolm.

"Would anyone care to make a guess?"

No one did.

"Very well. Let us say no more about it at the moment. Now, Sir Malcolm, since you have said you were instrumental in persuading two other members of this party to accept Ahab Jepson's invitation, will you tell us why you did so? We need not pretend that any degree of warmth existed between any of you and your late host. Why, then, accept his invitation?"

"Mr. Pons, I must violate a confidence to tell you, but I will do so," answered Sir Malcolm graciously. "I had learned that our host was a sick man, and that he had prepared an announcement of his retirement from the stage, though only forty-seven. Frankly, I believed this only a bid for some popular sympathy. My own doctor, however, had been consulted by Ahab Jepson; I took the liberty of making an inquiry, and was informed that our host was actually suffering from a heart ailment which compelled his retirement from all activity whatsoever, and which in all likelihood would take him off at any time. I felt sorry for him; so I came and persuaded the others to come, too."

"Thank you, gentlemen. That is all," said Pons.

In the hall, Pons paused to look up once again at the ingenious device which had brought Ahab Jepson to his death. He wore a satisfied smile when he turned to Cobbett at last.

"I take it you are quite settled in mind, Sergeant," he said. "Does anything remain to perplex you?"

"Mr. Pons, I confess I cannot imagine which one of them or which two could have committed this crime. It is what has troubled me from the beginning."

"My dear Cobbett, allow me to congratulate you," cried Pons, his eyes dancing. "You are quite right—none of them is guilty. Pray

follow your instincts—permit these gentlemen to repair to London without further delay, and say nothing to the press about their presence here."

Cobbett gaped at him, taken aback.

"It was staged with some eye for drama, but the eye was unsure. Ask yourself, as I did, why a box of veronal capsules should be wrapped in wax paper if not to take fingerprints? And why should it be required of Sir John to fill Ahab's glass if not for a similar reason? And surely Lord Barick was provoked into striking his host so that it might be duly recorded! But unfortunately, Ahab forgot something, if you take the trouble, as you must, to look into the matter—you'll find no evidence of fingerprints save only Ahab's and my own on the machinery of the chain—winch-handle and attached mechanism—or on the cupboard concealing it. He overlooked a vital detail, just as he seems to have done in most of his undertakings. He forgot to take his guests into the cellar and reveal the mechanism. But the whisky and veronal were necessary: the veronal—such capsules as he took were removed from the box before Sir John saw it—to make it look as if he had been drugged into a stupor, the whisky to screw up his nerve to that point at which he could walk down the stairs and hang himself in order to implicate and throw the dark cloud of scandal shamefully over the good names of four sterling gentlemen he could harm in no other way."

"An elementary matter," observed Pons, once we were seated in our compartment on the return trip to London that evening. "Cobbett himself gave us the initial suggestion of the truth on the way down. He said of Ahab, 'He had not been well.' But Cobbett thought himself confounded with four suspects, each with a motive to want Ahab Jepson out of the way. Nothing could have been further from the truth—it was not Cobbett's suspects who had motive to want Ahab out of the way—they had won the actions Ahab had brought—but Ahab who had motive to want them injured in such a way as to bring them some mental suffering. I proceeded, therefore, from the opposite basis—that the guests were innocent, and every discovery made at the house only verified it. Ahab's garish and slightly *gauche* touch was everywhere apparent. He was capable of killing them, but he wanted something more of them, and a scandal of such proportions as to involve them in

suspicion of murder would have served his purpose very well. It is to Cobbett's credit that he proceeded with such caution. He is a young man who shows promise of some ability in the field."

"But to kill himself!" I protested.

"He lived on borrowed time, Parker; so much is obvious. And whatever his unlovely attributes, he had a sincere love of the stage; to have to leave it was like a sentence of death. Nor could he bear to leave his exit to chance; like every actor, he wanted to plan and execute it himself. He did. He conceived a dastardly plan, set it in motion, and made his flamboyant exit, wholly melodramatic. A poor thing, but certainly his own; it was beyond his guests to have conceived it. It had all the marks of his conception. Alas, poor Ahab! His exit was in keeping with his life—pompous, florid, somewhat ignominious, and in his customary bad taste."

"It is simple enough, now you explain it," I agreed.

A wry smile touched Pons's lips. He turned to look out at the dim lights of the scattered houses flying past. "Inevitable," he murmured. "As Tacitus puts it, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*."

For years thereafter Pons was never without complimentary tickets to any London performance in which were displayed the histrionic abilities of the four gentlemen of the theatre who had been so ill-advised by sentiments of common humanity as to permit themselves to be the guests of Ahab Jepson on that fateful weekend at Stoke Poges.

## *The Adventure of the Swedenborg Signatures*

"I HAVE OFTEN maintained that the science of deduction, if carried to its logical conclusion, is capable of informing the trained observer with the same uncertainty as any set of facts put down with concomitant proof in writing," said my friend Solar Pons from his position at the window of our quarters at 7B Praed Street.

"All of which enables me to deduce that we may quite possibly be about to entertain a client," I said.

"Capital, Parker! I am always happy to realize that these little exercises in ratiocination make somewhat of an impression on you and do indeed stimulate you to a similar observation—in degree. Come and have a look at the young lady below."

I walked to Pons's side and looked down.

Across the street, a young woman of perhaps twenty-five years pursued her way. She was dark, though not a brunette. She wore a little toque on her head, and was otherwise clad in a neat grey suit with a touch of red at the lapels and cuffs. On her feet she wore sensible sandals, which had the look of the country about them. She walked up a little way, shot a glance toward our quarters, turned, and walked back.

"Now, then," said Pons, after a few moments, "what do you make of her?"

"She is obviously intending to pay us a visit," I said.

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"But there is some reason for delaying her call."

"Other than indecision?"

"She might be waiting for someone."

"I fancy not. I submit that if she were, her attention would be on the street, not on our quarters."

"She may be from the country."

"We make progress," said Pons dryly.

"Very well, then," I said, taking the plunge, "she is a lady's maid, come here at the behest of her mistress, on a mission of some delicacy."

Pons laughed heartily, his eyes twinkling. "Spoken like a true gentleman!" he cried. "And, I daresay, not too wide of the mark."

She is certainly in service of some kind, but I suggest a lady's companion rather than a maid. She may well be a less fortunate relative, for she dresses well, if modestly, and wears a definite, if subdued, air of independence. But she has not come at her companion's behest; she has come at her own discretion, and is nerving herself to take the final step. Moreover, she has a limited amount of time at her disposal, for she keeps glancing at her wrist-watch. Either she has another appointment, or she must catch a train. I submit it is the latter, for the hour is already late afternoon, too early for a dinner engagement, rather late for a business appointment. But she has made up her mind and is crossing the street. We shall soon hear what she has to say."

The outer bell sounded, and in a few moments Mrs. Johnson tapped on the door and ushered into our quarters the young lady we had been watching. With that intuition which seldom betrayed a client stepping into our rooms, she unerringly picked Pons as the object of her call.

"Mr. Solar Pons?"

"At your service, Miss."

"My name is Louise Graham, Mr. Pons."

"Pray be seated."

As she took the chair I propelled forward, Pons introduced me, and then went to lean against the mantel.

"Now, my dear young lady, since it is obvious that you are in haste—perhaps to catch a train—and equally so that you've been impelled to come here on a matter of some concern to you by nothing more than your own decision, I suggest we lose no time hearing your story."

A faint smile broke the tension of her face, but only momentarily. She grew grave again at once. "It's true," she began, "I don't know that I'm doing the right thing. But I wanted to come here and talk to you, because I cannot let my aunt continue as she has been doing, living in fear of events. Mr. Pons, do you know the Doctrine of Signatures?"

"Ah, that doctrine which holds that all events of major significance in a life are presaged by lesser events of the same nature," said Pons. "If the major event is to be malign, then the lesser and preceding events will be malign, also; if benign, then they too will be similar. The Doctrine has been wrongfully attributed to Emanuel Swedenborg."

"Yes, that is it, Mr. Pons. My aunt is a Swedenborgian—of a sort."

"Let us just begin at the beginning, Miss Graham."

"Forgive me. I am upset. When my father died four years ago, my brother and I were left orphaned. My brother Arthur had long before gone to seek his fortune in Africa, and I had no provision for existence, since my father, though a kind and thoughtful man, was a country vicar in Dorset and not given to the accumulation of worldly goods. My brother was still somewhere in Africa, still seeking his fortune, at the time of father's death; he didn't come home and made only a brief acknowledgment of the event; indeed, I lost touch with him altogether almost three years ago. After my father's effects were sold, it was evident that I must find a position somewhere, and it was then that my Aunt Agatha Stowecroft, who lives on a country estate not far from Canterbury on the London road, offered me a position as her companion. I accepted with gratitude.

"My Aunt Agatha and her children are my only living relatives. Uncle Diomede died six years ago, and left his wife and children well provided for. His wealth was close to half a million pounds, Mr. Pons, and all of it went to his wife, who parcels it out to her children as they need it—but sparingly. There were three children. Of these, two remain at home, though both are older than I am. They are my cousins Laurel and Alexander. The third, Courtenay, who was married, lived in Dover with his wife, until two weeks ago, when both of them were tragically killed in an accident when their car went out of control and plunged off the coast road.

"The household is a very strange one. Each of them has indulged himself to the utmost in his vagaries, if I may seem to speak so disrespectfully of them. My aunt, as I have said, calls herself a Swedenborgian. My cousin Laurel is a Spiritualist. My cousin Alex is an extremely erratic follower of a rather horrible man who calls himself the Great Beast."

Pons chuckled. "I fancy that will be Aleister Crowley."

"Yes, Mr. Pons, that is his name. However, I have very little to do with my cousins; my tasks lie with my aunt. I help her with her letters and such other writings as she engages in, particularly divinations. It is part of my task also to read to her, since Aunt Agatha can no longer see as well as once she could. I don't therefore see very much of my cousins, or even the servants, for the house is fully staffed, and so are the grounds, and most of the servants have been with the family for many years."

She paused and glanced swiftly at her watch, after which she went on in more rapid speech.



"About two months ago, Aunt Agatha announced that the Signatures were operating, and disaster impended. After four years in that house, no such announcement could possibly stir me. On innumerable occasions, my cousin Alex has announced that the Great Beast had had a vision and needed a thousand pounds, which my aunt refused to permit Alex to send him; or Miss Laurel has been in communication with someone in the other world and had information about the world of the future or some such thing; or my aunt has gone on about the Doctrines of Correspondences or Signatures. I paid no more attention to that announcement than to any other so common in that house.

"But then, Mr. Pons, strange things began to happen. At first they were only little things—like a broken lamp, a misplaced or lost object—but gradually they became more serious—Bannister, the butler, fell on the stairs and broke his leg; Mrs. Chenoweth, the cook, was run down in the lane approaching the London road, and seriously injured; and at last, the events which Aunt Agatha called the 'Signatures' culminated in the tragic deaths of my cousin Courtenay and his wife, Isobel.

"Yesterday, Mr. Pons, the 'Signatures' began again. Aunt Agatha's will disappeared. Mr. Pons, I don't believe in the Doctrine of Signatures or any other of these fantastic systems of thought or whatever they are. I have a strong Anglican faith, and that is quite enough for me. But just the same, there's something wrong in that house, and Aunt Agatha at least is convinced that the 'Signatures' predict her own death. Would it be possible for you to come to Canterbury and speak with her yourself?"

"I daresay it would. We could present ourselves tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, then, Mr. Pons," said our client, coming to her feet.

"Do not be hasty, Miss Graham. There are a few questions I would like to ask you. You spoke of Mrs. Stowecroft's will. Did you know the contents of her will?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. I helped her and her lawyer when it was drawn up."

"In case of her death, who inherits?"

"Her children, of course. In case any one of the three predeceases her—as has now happened—the estate is to be divided among the survivors."

"And if all the children should predecease her?"

"Then to her grandchildren, if any."

"Since there are none, to whom then?"

"To myself."

"No one else is named in the document?"

"No one, Mr. Pons. My Aunt Agatha is now seventy years old, and certainly not long for this world. It is beyond the bounds of probability that all her heirs should predecease her."

"How did Mrs. Stowecroft discover that her will had disappeared?"

"She is accustomed to reading it over from time to time. Usually it is kept in a little wall-safe in the study, but sometimes it is left in a false book on the study table. It was from this book that it had vanished. I should say that my aunt frequently drew up a new will, but the only change of any importance she has ever made was the addition of my own name six months after I came to live with them."

Pons had crossed to his favourite chair, and now sat in an attitude of deep thought, his eyes closed, his feet stretched toward the coal-scuttle, the fingers of one hand lightly stroking his left ear.

"You have mentioned the staff," he said presently, "as having been with the family for many years. Presumably most of them date back to a time when your late uncle still lived?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. All but two—Bannister replaced the old butler at his death, three and a half years ago. And there's Nicholson, an assistant handyman, who was retained two years ago. But he is principally outside the house, helping Bligh, the gardener."

Pons took out his watch and glanced at it. "Canterbury is two hours from Victoria. You can be home by seven o'clock and still, perhaps, in time for dinner. We will call on you tomorrow after lunch, Miss Graham."

After our client had gone, Pons turned to me, his eyes twinkling. "Was that not a unique matter, Parker?"

"A rigmarole of superstitious nonsense!" I answered sharply.

"Miss Graham, at least, shares your views," observed Pons. "Nothing about her narrative struck you?"

"Only that the poor young woman sorely demonstrates the need for the Anglican church to take immediate steps toward increasing the living of their vicars so that young ladies left in Miss Graham's predicament need not be subjected to such environments."

"Come, come, Parker," said Pons, clucking his disapproval, "are not all things that exist of interest to the inquiring mind? I should be inclined to think so. Did not the family of the late Diomedes Stowecroft impress you as decidedly different?"

"So are the occupants of any bedlam," I retorted.

"You are at your most cantankerous," said Pons, imperturbably.

"I submit, nevertheless, that our client was not ill-advised to call at 7B. By Mr. and Mrs. Courtenay Stowecroft's deaths, the little circle of Mrs. Agatha Stowecroft's heirs is appreciably diminished."

"Accidents *will* increase with the tempo of living in our time."

"Spoken with appropriate sententiousness, Parker. I suggest there is more here than meets the eye."

"That is an observation which is true in any circumstances."

"Think again of the will Miss Graham mentioned. You were not aware of any significant omission?"

I threw up my hands. "My dear Pons!" I cried, "I'm convinced that the household is certifiable, lock, stock, and barrel—the inhabitants for being plainly mad, the servants for being equally touched to endure them and remain there. If there were any omission in the will, it was probably the servants, and no doubt the long list of charities which one might expect of so erratic a household—donations to the Society for Psychical Research, the furtherance of Crowleyism, and possibly a home for retired Swedenborgians."

Pons smiled. "You're in fine fettle today, Parker. I submit, however, that our client was sincere in coming here."

"Undoubtedly."

"And that she, at least, for all that she professes no belief in the Doctrine of Signatures, is convinced that the matter ought to be inquired into."

"Certainly."

"It doesn't strike you that there is one significant detail which stands out in Miss Graham's narrative?"

"It bristles with details, none significant."

"No, no, there is one detail I would call to your attention. None of the events which have gone to bear out the theory of the Signatures is incapable of manufacture."

"Ah, and the motive?"

"An interesting one begs to offer itself. We shall just see. However, in view of your scorn for the idiosyncrasies of the Stowecrofts, perhaps you would prefer to remain here tomorrow?"

"That is a wholly unwarranted assumption," I replied.

We were not destined to visit our client the following day, for in the morning a telegram was delivered asking us to delay our visit. During the night, Miss Laurel Stowecroft had walked out in her

sleep, had fallen into a stream which crossed the estate, and had been found drowned.

"So that is the second major event foretold by the Signatures," mused Pons, tossing the form to the table where we were at breakfast. "We are left only with Alexander, among the children. The devotee of the Great Beast. What do you know of Crowleyism, Parker?"

"Nothing at all."

"I believe the Beast holds that his needs, physical, financial, and otherwise, are to be satisfied above all else. That is his supreme credo, and his disciples exist solely but to gratify him."

"A poor, addled lot."

"Beyond question."

"You think it is Alexander, then?"

"I have not said so," he answered, annoyingly.

Four days later, Pons and I took a train and were duly delivered in Canterbury. Pons chose to take lodgings near St. Dunstan's, rather than avail himself of an invitation from Miss Graham to stay at Stowecroft Hall, and then, learning that the Hall was within easy walking distance, he set out for our destination without delay, once we had taken lunch.

Stowecroft Hall was an imposing house in an estate larger than I had assumed it might be. The Hall was Georgian in architecture and rose at the far end of a double drive across a gracious lawn, broken by flower-beds and many little groves of bushes. Behind the Hall rose a yew alley, which led to some further buildings and to an adjoining wood.

Our client awaited us.

"I've explained to Aunt Agatha," she said. "She doesn't look with any confidence on your visit, I should tell you, but then, she is a strange woman, and she is not opposed to it, either. My cousin Laurel's death has shaken her badly."

"Your cousin was in the habit of walking in her sleep?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Is it not odd, Parker, that she should not have awakened at striking the water?"

"Yes, but it isn't impossible that she should not. Despite all that has been written of somnambulism, not much is known of its compulsions."

"Who discovered her?" asked Pons then.

"Bligh," answered Miss Graham.

She now turned and led the way into the Hall until she came to double doors, before which she paused and tapped gently. "Aunt Agatha?"

"Come, child."

Our client opened the doors and preceded us into the room, where she stood aside to let us pass into the presence of a tall, white-haired old lady, clad in sombre black satin. She sat in a high-backed chair at a long flat table, which appeared to be covered with divination charts and manuscripts.

"Aunt Agatha, these are the gentlemen I spoke to you about," said Miss Graham.

"How do you do, gentlemen," said the old lady. "Won't you be seated? It seems a little early for tea, but. . . ." Her voice wandered off expectantly.

"Thank you. We have just had lunch," said Pons.

"Ah, very well. I understand you are interested in the Doctrine of Signatures." Here she turned to Miss Graham, and said, "They have begun again, my child."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes," said the old lady, nodding gravely. "Toby has been found in the well. Dead. My cat," she added to us. "But then, if I understood my niece correctly, you gentlemen do not believe in the Signatures."

"Say rather we have open minds," replied Pons gently.

"I fear, if I read the signs properly, I am not long for this world," continued the old lady. "I have lost a son and a daughter, as well as a daughter-in-law, and still the Signatures indicate a greater tragedy that is yet to come. What could be more final than my own death? I have known the days of my years."

Pons, however, was not listening. His keen eyes darted here and there, and presently he made a sign to our client that he wished the interview to be terminated. Immediately Miss Graham rose, made excuses for us, and showed us out of the room.

"Now I should like to view the spot where Miss Laurel Stowecroft's body was found," he said.

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

She did not question his motives, but led the way outside and around the house to where a broad brook flowed toward the highway and beyond. A couple of dogs started up from the out-buildings and followed us, looking curiously on. Miss Graham

paused and showed us the place where the body had been found; much trampling of the turf and the brook's edge was still in evidence.

Pons, however, spent but a few moments at the place. He gazed back toward the house, which was in plain sight. Then he crouched and began systematically to examine the ground, moving in small half circles over outward and back toward the house, not in the way we had come, but along a row of tall bushes paralleling our path. He darted in and out among the bushes, first on one side, then on another. Along the near side, finally, he paused and dropped to his knees.

"Someone has been carrying something heavy along here," he said. "There is depth to these prints, Parker."

"Is that not elementary, Pons?" I could not help asking. "This is the way that unfortunate woman's body was taken back to the house."

Pons favoured me with a glance akin to scorn, at which I smiled, knowing his vanity had been touched.

Miss Graham, meanwhile, had watched him in perplexity. As he came to his feet, Pons suggested to her that, since he wished to speak to Bligh, she might return to the house, whither we would soon follow.

Accordingly, she took her departure.

With her going, the dogs became less friendly and followed us, barking, to the stables and out-buildings, among which stood a trim, neat greenhouse. It was to this that Pons made his way.

The first person we encountered was a short, stocky man in his early forties. He was heavily bearded, with dark, curly hair reaching well up his cheeks. His dark little eyes looked at us suspiciously.

"Bligh?" asked Pons.

"No, sir. The name is Nicholson. Bligh's inside." He touched his cap respectfully.

Pons pushed past him and confronted a tall, dour individual, who looked at us as suspiciously as his assistant had done.

"Miss Graham directed us here, Bligh," said Pons disarmingly. "We understood you discovered Miss Laurel Stowecroft's body."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me, you were in the grounds on the night of the accident?"

"I was, sir. I make my quarters in the rear of this building."

"Did you at any time during the night of Miss Laurel's death hear any sort of disturbance?"

"No, sir, I did not." He rubbed his chin reflectively. "I'm a sound enough sleeper, but I'd have heard anything that was to be heard. I'm trained for that, sir."

Pons thanked him and returned to the house where Miss Graham waited. She watched him come toward her, anxiously.

"Is my aunt in any danger, Mr. Pons?" she asked as he came up.

"Let me assure you that, for the time being, Mrs. Stowecroft is in not the slightest danger," he answered.

"Thank you, Mr. Pons, I am relieved to know it."

"I shall return presently to London, but I may very probably be back in the vicinity in the near future," Pons went on. "However, before I go, there are a few further questions I should like to ask. About Mr. Alexander Stowecroft, for one. How does he occupy his time?"

"Why, he is ever about his support for Crowley," said Miss Graham disapprovingly. "He reads, writes long letters, tries to get money for the Beast."

"And fails, no doubt," said Pons, smiling. "Does he have any normal pursuits? Does he play darts, go to the pub, fish?"

"No, Mr. Pons. But he shoots. He has the shooting rights over the woods and the adjoining country."

"Ah. And does he have any special day for that?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Thursday. The shooting is perhaps the only regular occupation of his life. He goes out at two o'clock in the afternoon and returns at five. They say he is a good shot."

"Does he use a beater?"

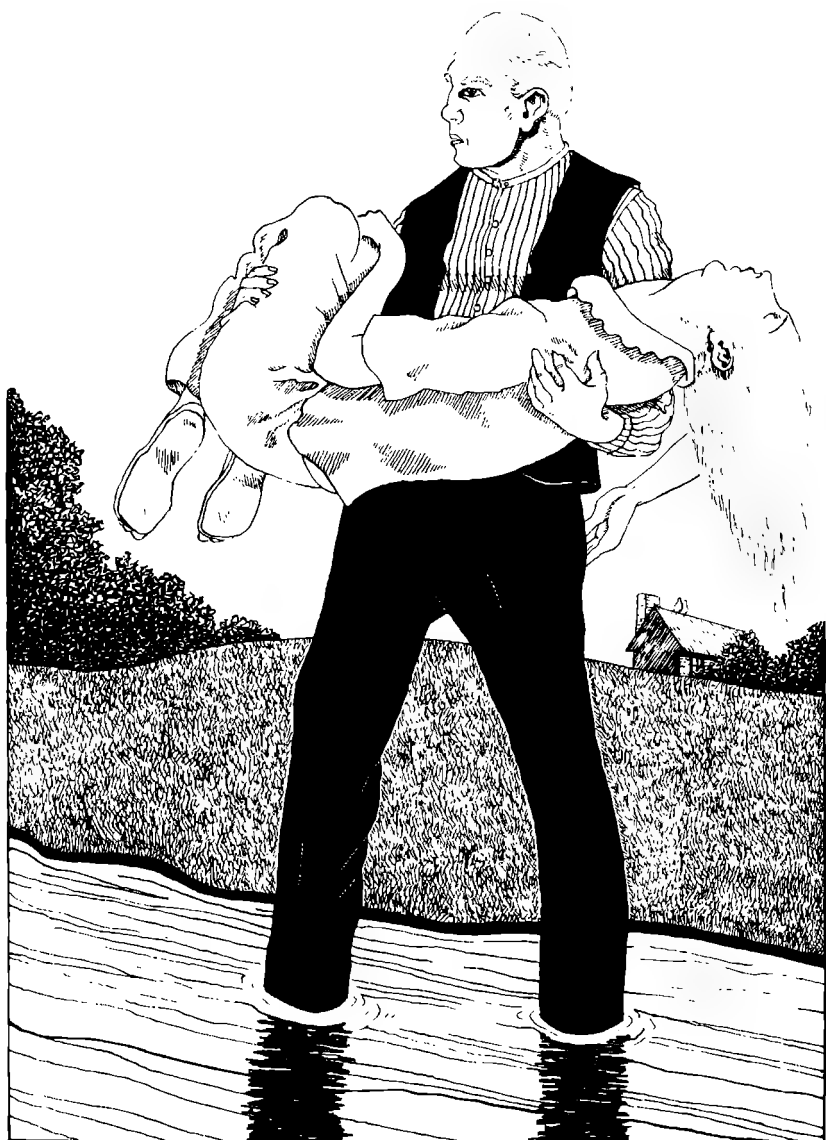
"Sometimes Bligh or Nicholson or one of the men from the stables—Jepson, usually—goes along."

"If anything untoward occurs, pray do not fail to notify me, Miss Graham," said Pons then. "Though Mrs. Stowecroft is in no immediate danger, I do not doubt that someone bent on diabolical mischief is acting against the family."

On the way back to London, Pons sat in our compartment with his arms folded across his chest, and his head sunk down, his eyes closed. His silence annoyed me, I confess, and presently I could endure it no longer.

"I've witnessed some astonishing feats of deduction on your part before this time, Pons, but I am completely at a loss to understand this latest," I said.

"I don't doubt it," he replied with some asperity. "Anyone who could look at a row of deeply set footprints leading toward the







brook and away from the house and loftily announce that of course 'they' were carrying Miss Laurel Stowecroft's body to the house has, I daresay, something wanting in his ability to follow my poor powers."

"I had not noticed," I admitted. "You are ahead of me."

"You are unusually flattering, Parker," he said, chuckling. "Has nothing else occurred to you about this singular business?"

"I confess I have not thought of anything. I suppose, now, that the lady was murdered."

"Her death was certainly not an accident. She was evidently carried from the house or its vicinity by her murderer, either in a somnambulistic or stunned condition, and held under the water until she was drowned. Can you doubt that the drowning of the cat, Toby, and all the other 'Signatures' were as easily arranged? I submit therefore that only someone thoroughly familiar with the household is behind this sequence of events. You will recall the action of the dogs. As soon as Miss Graham left us, they barked at us—we were strange to them. Yet Bligh could not testify to hearing any disturbance on the night of Miss Stowecroft's death. So whoever walked with her and carried her to her death was known to them. How does the picture look to you now, Parker?"

"I see clearly that Alex Stowecroft is now his mother's sole heir."

"Ah, we make progress," said Pons dryly. "And if Miss Laurel's death was arranged, certainly it is reasonable to venture that that of Courtenay and Isobel Stowecroft was also designed."

"Oh, come, Pons, any car is apt to go out of control."

"I dislike meaningful coincidences that come so opportunely," replied Pons. "I sent a telegram to Dover some days ago. We should have an answer before long."

Indeed, the answer to Pons's query awaited us at our quarters.

Pons read it, smiled, and threw the telegram to the table before me, so that I too could read it. "Evidence Stowecroft Car Tampered With Please Advise." It was signed by Police-Inspector P. H. Ramsey.

"We are about to lock horns with a determined murderer," said Pons. "Two days hence will find us once again at Stowecroft Hall. From two to five in the afternoon, Miss Graham said. We shall just see whether we can stop him three short of six."

"You talk as if you knew him," I said.

"Have I said I did not?" Pons demanded with what I thought unseemly arrogance. "Indeed, Parker, I submit that few problems

have offered so patent a solution. We are handicapped only by the lack of sufficient evidence for conviction, and are therefore forced to gamble another life to win it. I dislike the course, but necessity demands it."

The following Thursday afternoon found us once again in the vicinity of Canterbury. Pons had not troubled to present himself to our client at Stowecroft Hall, but had taken us directly to the wood soon after lunch. There he had ensconced himself in a position from which he had a clear view of the Hall in his binoculars. Significantly, he was armed with both a revolver and a leaded stick, and he had insisted on my being armed as well.

At two o'clock precisely, Pons announced that Alexander Stowecroft had emerged from the house. "Now he is going to the out-buildings for a beater," he went on. "Ah, he has chosen one of them. Now he is making for the upper part of the wood. Come along, Parker."

So saying, he slid down from his eminence and moved off in a rapid trot in the direction of Alexander Stowecroft. Once in sight of him, however, he slowed.

"Keep down, Parker," he instructed me. "We must not be seen."

In this skulking fashion, we followed Stowecroft and his beater, who also served from time to time as his gun-bearer, for well over an hour. Pons's patience was the direct antithesis of my own impatience. I saw no point in this meaningless chase, and lacked only the opportunity to say so forcefully.

It was shortly after three o'clock that afternoon when Stowecroft and his man came out into a grassy glade and made for a railed fence which they obviously intended to cross. Stowecroft, who was in the lead, turned as he approached the fence, and passed his gun to his companion. Then, as Stowecroft began to climb through between the rails, the beater ran forward, holding Stowecroft's gun at precisely the angle it might have been held if Stowecroft himself were carrying it in crossing the fence.

Pons leaped to his feet with a warning shout.

But he was too late to prevent the contrived "accident" he had foreseen. The gun went off, and Alexander Stowecroft tumbled to the ground.

"Your man, Parker," said Pons.

Then, swinging his leaded stick in ever swifter circles, he made off after the beater, who had begun to run at sight of us. Halfway to

the scene, Pons let fly. The heavy head of the stick caught the beater in the back of the head. He went down like a stone, not far from where Stowecroft lay groaning.

I came up to Stowecroft and dropped to my knees at his side. He was still breathing, and his wound, I saw, was not mortal, if I could manage to stanch the flow of blood. Had it been but a few inches lower! I worked hastily, and succeeded at last.

"A near thing," I said to Pons, who had been standing by. Then I glanced over toward the beater. "Whom have we here?" I saw the edge of a bearded face. "Why, it's Nicholson!"

"Mr. Arthur Graham, alias Nicholson," said Pons. "I fancy this will put an end to those mysteriously opportune 'Signatures,' as well as to Mr. Graham's bloody game."

"The identity of the man whose hand was behind the events at Stowecroft Hall was never in doubt for a moment," said Pons as we sat in our compartment on our way back to London later that day. "Nicholson was the only man who had joined the staff after Miss Graham last was in touch with her brother. You will recall that our client mentioned that her benefactor had added her name to the will six months after she had come to work there. That would have been just after the new butler had come, and some months before Miss Graham last heard from her brother. Miss Graham has admitted having written her brother that she had been named in her aunt's will; soon after, she testified, she heard nothing further from him. Two years ago Nicholson turned up and took a position at Stowecroft Hall; Arthur Graham was effectively concealed behind his full beard, and his own sister never recognized him, thinking him somewhere on the dark continent.

"He spent almost two years studying his relatives, and then seized upon his aunt's superstitious beliefs to pave the way for the elimination of those people who stood between him and the fortune he sought."

"But Arthur Graham wasn't mentioned in her will," I protested.

"That was precisely the point to which I so vainly called your attention on the occasion of Miss Graham's visit to our quarters. He need not have been. If Mrs. Stowecroft died after her children, then our client inherited. If then our client herself died, Arthur was her only heir. He meant to have a fortune by one means or another. He got halfway to it."

## *The Adventure of the Spurious Tamerlane*

"A SUMMER IDYLL," was what my friend Solar Pons called the curious adventure which began one July afternoon with the appearance on the threshold of our quarters in Praed Street of a street gamin bearing a somewhat begrimed folded note. Under tousled blond hair, his blue eyes looked up at me out of a freckled face.

"Mr. Pons?" he asked. "Mr. Solar Pons?"

It was a rare occasion on which a visitor did not immediately identify Pons, who stood behind me in the living-room, and I hesitated a moment before replying.

"'E said as it was 7B," said the boy urgently.

"And it is, my lad," said Pons, coming up behind me and reaching for the paper clutched in our visitor's fingers, while with the other hand he tossed him a shilling.

The boy caught his tip and was off like a flash, clattering down the steps in marked contrast to the careful manner in which he had mounted to our floor.

Pons stepped over to the window, unfolding the note as he walked. He read it without expression, but his eyes were twinkling when he handed me the paper. It was rough to the touch, and had a torn edge characteristic of the valley of a book. Its message had been hastily scrawled with a pencil on the first piece of paper to come to hand.

"Mr. Pons, dear sir," it read, "I would be obliged to you if you could step around to my barrow. I have something of a problem that may interest you. I am, sir, your respectful servant, Joshua Bryant."

"What do you make of that, Parker?" asked Pons.

I was sure of my ground and answered confidently. "This note is written on the endpaper of a book—an old book, and no doubt secondhand," I said. "Mr. Bryant is very probably a dealer in secondhand books."

Pons burst into approving laughter, clapped me heartily on the back and cried, "At any time now I can retire to Sussex and keep bees! Is it not remarkable what a little exposure to ordinary ratiocination will do for one!"

"You know him, then?"

"He has a book barrow in Farringdon Road. I have on occasion paused to look over his wares."

"You're going then?"

"I never scorn the possibility of a little adventure to vary the prosaic routine," he said. "Let us just step around and pay Mr. Bryant a call."

The Farringdon Road Book Market consisted of a row of barrows—some on wheels, some on wooden supports which held only boards on which books were displayed—set along the kerb. The wheeled barrows were supplied with canvas covering which could be rolled back on sunny days, and unrolled to cover books and browsers on days of rain and bad weather. The market was not far from Farringdon Station in one direction and the Great Northern Railway Depot in the other, and the spire of St. Paul's rose on the horizon behind the row of barrows. A score of people browsed among the books at the kerb, most of them men.

Joshua Bryant was a short, rotund man with a florid face which made a strong contrast to his thatch of white hair. His eyes were bright and alert, and bespoke more than ordinary intelligence. He acknowledged his introduction to me with a friendly nod, but his face told us nothing.

"I appreciate your coming, Mr. Pons," he said, without preamble. "Have a look at that."

So saying, he took from the side pocket of his jacket a slender, tea-coloured, paperbound booklet and laid it before Pons, deftly turning back the cover to the title page, which could be read at a glance. "*Tamerlane and Other Poems*. By a Bostonian." A quotation from Cowper followed, though somewhat badly printed: "Young bards are giddy, and young hearts are warm, / And make mistakes for manhood to reform." Then came the name of the publisher: "Boston: Calvin F. S. Thomas Printer," and the date: "1827."

I glanced at Pons and saw his eyes lit with interest. He in turn looked inquiringly at Bryant.

"Mr. Pons," he said earnestly, "that book was not on my barrow when I came here this morning. It doesn't belong to me. I neither bought it nor took it in in trade. Yet I found it among the books about two hours ago." His eyes challenged Pons. "Do you know its value?"

"It is one of the rarest of American books," said Pons. "Worth

perhaps five thousand pounds."

Bryant nodded. "It's worth more than I am," he said wryly. "I said to myself right away, There's a smell of fish about this! So I sent off that note to you."

Pons picked up the booklet. "May I borrow it? I will give you a receipt for it."

"Do, Mr. Pons."

"But first, a question or two. What of your clientele this morning?"

"Oh, the usual. I have the regulars, Mr. Pons, the same as anyone else. Then there are those who come and go."

"Ah, but anyone unusual?"

Bryant looked thoughtful. "A lady," he said presently. "She bought a book of poems. Rupert Brooke."

"Describe her."

"Young, well-dressed, married. Not the sort I'd have expected to see here, but then, Mr. Pons, books draw from all walks of life."

"Dark or light?"

"Oh, on the dark side. Chestnut brown."

"The colour of her eyes?"

"She wore tinted glasses."

"I see. Anyone else?"

"A young barrister, I took him to be. He bought a *Raffles*. Then there was the elderly gentleman in morning-clothes. Got out of a Daimler, driven by a chauffeur. The barrister was perhaps thirty-five, the elderly gentleman certainly thirty years older. They lingered a bit, whereas the lady more or less drifted by."

"What did the elderly gentleman buy?"

"Nothing, Mr. Pons. I thought he'd take a book on chess he looked at for a while, but he put it back."

"Did any of these people go to any other barrow, if you noticed?"

"The barrister stopped at them all. The lady just walked away, and the elderly gentleman returned to his car and was driven off."

"Can you describe him?"

"Grey-haired, but not as white as I am, Mr. Pons. He wore a Masonic ring. His hands were well groomed. There was a moustache on his upper lip, but his chin was clean-shaven. He had blue eyes, and a squarish face."

"Anyone further?"

Bryant shook his head.

"Very well. You'll hear from me, Mr. Bryant."

Pons said not a word all the way back to 7B, and, once there, he retired at once to the corner of the room by the window where he kept his scientific laboratory, such as it was. There I left him to attend to three calls I had to make.

When I returned to our quarters in time for dinner, I found Pons sitting deep in thought in his favourite chair, his eyes closed and his fingers tented before him. He had evidently only just finished a pipeful of the odoriferous shag he smoked, for our quarters reeked of it.

"I suppose you've solved the mystery of Mr. Bryant's valuable book," I ventured.

"No, no," he said almost irritably, "it is more of a mystery than ever. And the book is not valuable. It is spurious—a very clever copy, but a forgery."

He came to his feet and strode to the table where the *Tamerlane* lay.

"Look here, Parker. The date of publication is 1827. Less than a dozen copies of this book are known to exist, though a considerably larger edition was printed. Poe wrote that the book was 'suppressed for private reasons'—this accounts for its scarcity. But this copy could not have been printed in 1827, for an analysis of the paper on which it has been printed shows that the paper was made of chemically treated wood pulp. Chemical treatment for wood pulp was not, however, introduced in papermaking until after 1880. Further, the paper contains esparto grass, which was not used until 1861. And most obvious of all, the type has no kerns, and alphabets without kerns were not introduced anywhere in the world until the early 1880s. This book therefore has no value except as a literary curiosity."

"Then no one, after all, has lost or misplaced a valuable book," I said.

"Ah, that is the nub of the problem. I submit that the reason for the existence of this spurious *Tamerlane* is likely to be of more interest than its discovery in Bryant's barrow. One of his customers this morning left it there."

"But which?"

"I submit it was the lady. I detected lint from her white gloves on the book, but even so, it is quite the sort of thing a lady would be more likely to do than a man. The book is a skilled, professional



job. How came it into being? Was it done with the intention of deceiving someone into buying it? If so, how came it on to Bryant's barrow?"

"It was certainly done with the intention of deceiving someone," I said. "What other purpose would a spurious copy of anything have?"

"Elementary," agreed Pons. "But I submit that the precise purpose of the deception is not nearly so clear. Presumptive evidence suggests that the copy was not made to be sold."

"What then, was it made for?"

"That seems to be the problem. Had it been made to be sold, we could hardly expect to discover it 'lost' on a barrow in Farringdon Road. But its only other purpose must have been to deceive a collector for some reason."

"You infer then that it served its purpose?"

"Precisely."

"Then why not simply destroy it?"

"A man would logically have done so. But women are not as logical. I put it to you that the lady could not bear to destroy something in the creation of which so much effort was expended."

"Where do you go from here, then?" I asked.

"I hoped you might be able to tell me," he said gently. "Does no course of action suggest itself to you?"

I threw up my hands. "To find a woman on so slight a description as that supplied by Bryant seems to me next to impossible. There must be a hundred thousand women who fit that description in Greater London."

"More," agreed Pons.

"But perhaps there is a genuine *Tamerlane* in London."

"Capital!" cried Pons. "My dear fellow, I congratulate you. It so happens that there is such a book. It is in the possession of the well-known bibliophile, Lord Heltsham. My brother knows him reasonably well. While you were on your rounds I took the opportunity of sending around to Bancroft asking him to dispatch a note by messenger to his lordship asking that I be permitted to examine his genuine *Tamerlane* for a few minutes at noon tomorrow."

"Heltsham is hardly likely to be home at that hour," I pointed out.

"Oh, it isn't his lordship I wish to see. I count on seeing his wife. He would hardly be likely to trust a servant to show me such a treasure."

"Lady Heltsham!"

"I fancy her ladyship knows considerably more about the spurious *Tamerlane* than Lord Heltsham does. I am eager to add her knowledge to my own," said Pons with an enigmatic smile. "I chose tomorrow, because I saw in this morning's *Times* that his lordship has a committee meeting in the Lords at noon."

Promptly at twelve o'clock next day we presented ourselves at the front door of Lord Heltsham's townhouse in Bedford Square. The butler admitted us, showed us into the drawing-room, and retired. Presently Lady Heltsham swept into the room—a young, attractive, and vivacious woman, considerably her husband's junior. Her pleasant brown eyes looked from one to the other of us, and without hesitation fixed upon Pons.

"Mr. Pons? I have the pleasure of your brother's acquaintance."

"I presume upon it, your ladyship," said Pons, and introduced me.

"You are reclusive, sir," said Lady Heltsham. "While your brother moves about socially, I see nothing of you."

"Ah, your ladyship, we move in different circles. Bancroft would not be seen in mine, and I do not derive much profit in his."

"You are a collector of books?" she asked then.

"Say, rather, of circumstances, events, and curious happenings," said Pons. "My interest is in the human comedy."

A little nonplussed, Lady Heltsham came to the point of our visit. "My husband tells me you wish to examine his copy of *Tamerlane*."

"If I could impose upon you for a few minutes," said Pons.

"This way, please."

Lady Heltsham led the way into her husband's study, a room lined with books behind locked glass doors almost from floor to ceiling to such an extent that the room was unnaturally dark. Lady Heltsham moved directly to the mahogany table in the centre of the room and turned on the strong light there.

"I will bring it to you, Mr. Pons," she said.

She crossed to one of the cases, unlocked it, and took from it a slender slipcase. This she brought to the table, and from it removed what seemed at first glance to be the duplicate of the book Joshua Bryant had laid before Pons the previous day.

Pons, however, was peering not at the *Tamerlane*, but at the wall behind Lady Heltsham. "Forgive me," he said, "but surely that is not a first-edition set of Dickens?"

She turned.

Instantly Pons exchanged for the genuine *Tamerlane* on the table the spurious copy he had carried along from our quarters.

"I believe it is, Mr. Pons," said Lady Heltsham, amused. "It hasn't the value, of course, of this little book — hardly more than a chapbook, as you see."

Pons turned back the cover with a reverent air.

"What could have been the 'private reasons' which caused its suppression?" he murmured.

"I suppose we will never know, Mr. Pons."

"That is surely a challenge for some biographer," Pons went on, turning to the first page of text.

He bent to peer closely at the page, then turned from this position to look strangely at Lady Heltsham.

"What is it, Mr. Pons?"

"Surely his lordship is aware that this is not a genuine *Tamerlane*?" he asked quietly.

Lady Heltsham bent instantly at his side, her face quickening with alarm.

"The absence of kerns, you see," began Pons.

But he did not go on. Lady Heltsham's simultaneous reaction was so violent that Pons's words were stopped in this throat. She uttered a great cry of anguish, and without a moment's hesitation rushed headlong from the room.

Pons immediately exchanged books once more, returned the genuine *Tamerlane* to its slipcase, and the encased book to its place on the shelf. He turned the key in the lock and brought the little ring of keys to which it was attached to the table to leave it in place of the book.

The motor of a car roared into life somewhere outside the house.

"Her ladyship is now on her way to Farringdon Road," said Pons.

"That was a cruel trick, Pons," I said hotly.

"Was it not?" he agreed. "I rather think, however, that Lady Heltsham would never have admitted to any part in the matter of the spurious *Tamerlane* if I had not tricked her so. I regret the shock to her."

Pons sat in silence in the cab on the way back to our quarters until I broke into his meditation.

"I fail to understand Lord Heltsham's role," I said.

"If I am not mistaken, the spurious *Tamerlane* was used to

occupy the slipcase during the absence of the genuine one," said Pons.

"Then Lord Heltsham never saw it!"

"In all likelihood he did not. I submit that the forgery was intended to deceive him should he have occasion to glance into the slipcase, though a close examination would have revealed the deception. The forged copy having served its purpose, it was dropped into Bryant's barrow. The gambit I took was intended to make Lady Heltsham believe that, in spite of her certainty to the contrary, she had inadvertently dropped the real *Tamerlane* in Farringdon Road. She has gone there to see. Bryant, who has no reason to dissemble, will tell her what has happened to the copy she left there, and in all probability her ladyship will then arrive at the correct explanation of the little scene in which she played such an impetuous role. She will return to her husband's study and discover the real *Tamerlane* in its slipcase; she will then know that I deliberately tricked her."

"And she will call on you," I put in.

"I doubt it. Lady Heltsham will wait upon me to make the next move."

"Pons, you cannot go back to the house."

"At the moment I have no intention of doing so. If I read her ladyship aright, she will tell us nothing. I shall have to use other means to learn why she found it necessary to remove her husband's valuable *Tamerlane* for some time from its slipcase and substitute a spurious copy."

"Could it not have been used to make a potential buyer of the spurious copy believe he was buying the genuine *Tamerlane*?" I asked.

"If that were the explanation," said Pons a trifle impatiently, "surely I would not now be in possession of the forgery."

"Of course not," I agreed.

"You imply further that Lady Heltsham might have been guilty of such criminal deception. Far from it. I submit that the lady acted out of desperation."

"I find this matter more baffling every moment," I said.

"Tut, tut! If we accept the premise that the spurious copy was meant only for the casual deception I have postulated, an interesting use for the real *Tamerlane* then suggests itself. Indeed, at the moment, unlikely as it seems, it remains as the only tenable

one. You will remember my credo—when all the impossible explanations have been eliminated, then whatever remains, improbable as it may be, must be the truth."

"And that?"

"Surely so valuable an object as the rare *Tamerlane* would make excellent collateral!"

"Of course."

"And if her ladyship needed money urgently and could not ask her husband for it, she might persuade herself to borrow the *Tamerlane*. I myself would lend her up to three thousand pounds on such security—providing I had it to lend. I submit that any bank in London would do the same."

"Then you need only apply to the banks."

"Ah, that is information no reputable bank would divulge. Yet, in the interests of Lady Heltsham, we shall have to examine into this matter from another quarter. Unless I am badly mistaken, she may yet have further need for the spurious *Tamerlane* she had made for her desperate purpose."

"I daresay you are hardly the person Lady Heltsham would care to see at this point."

"I do not doubt it," agreed Pons. "She will not see me."

"Lord Heltsham then?"

"The very last person to whom to make application." He shook his head. "No, Parker—these waters run a little deeper than you may think. We shall have to proceed with caution lest we precipitate the very tragedy Lady Heltsham seems to fear."

Thereafter he said no more, and we rode the rest of the way in silence, Pons leaning back with his eyes closed so that the passing scene might not distract him from his train of thought.

Pons was up and away before I rose next morning, and without touching the breakfast Mrs. Johnson had brought up. I went out on my rounds soon after, pausing briefly at our quarters in passing at midday, only to find Pons still absent. He did not return until the dinner hour, following me in by thirty minutes, and wearing a sober, preoccupied air.

"I have been inquiring into that little matter of the spurious *Tamerlane*," he said as he took up a position at the mantel and began to fill his pipe with shag.

"Ah, you have solved it," I cried.

He shook his head impatiently. "Come, come, Parker, it is not a matter of solving, as you put it, but of knowing just where to take hold of it to bring about its resolution. How did Lady Heltsham strike you? A woman of character?"

"I thought so."

"And I."

"And under considerable stress."

"Elementary."

"But controlled—apart, that is, from exposure to sudden shocks prepared by Mr. Solar Pons."

Pons bowed his acknowledgment. "Would you not conclude, then, that if such a woman needed money, she would attempt to raise it through her own possessions before she borrowed her husband's?"

"I would, indeed."

"I have been making the rounds of the pawnshops for the better part of the day," said Pons then. "A description of the lady, with tinted glasses added and, no doubt, an assumed name, has led me to conclude that Lady Heltsham has borrowed money against all but her most essential jewels, two autographed books of some rarity belonging to her, some valuable furs—and, at last, the *Tamerlane*, which alone has been redeemed because Lady Heltsham was fortunate enough to come into a small inheritance from an uncle. Indeed, announcement of it appears only in the evening papers, though the inheritance was obviously paid some time ago—two thousand pounds, all of which, I venture to guess, went to redeem her husband's *Tamerlane*."

"You've not confronted her with these facts?"

"Certainly not. I shall not. This need for money has been of comparatively short duration. Scarcely a year. Would it surprise you to learn that within that time Lady Heltsham has also begun to bet on horses and to invest on the Stock Market?"

"Ah, it is that vice!"

"Gently, gently, Parker. That is surely not a vice so rapidly acquired."

"But it is one in which she could hardly expect her husband to foot the bill," I put in.

"It does not strike you as curiously coincidental that Lady Heltsham, who had previously shunned the races and the market, should suddenly begin to wager money and to invest it—somewhat incautiously?"

"Which came first?" I asked. "The pawning of her valuables or the wagering?"

"The pawnings."

I shrugged. "And with that money she gambled!"

"You have a tidy mind, Parker, and you are always singularly direct. It does not seem to you unlikely that Lord Heltsham is too penurious to deny his wife a little money for a pleasure which has always commanded the allegiance of the upper classes?"

"I haven't the noble lord's acquaintance, so I can hardly speak for him," I said, "but it is not improbable."

Pons nodded, his lips pursed, his eyes intent upon some point in space beyond the walls of our quarters. "There is one little aspect of the matter that puts an added light on it," said Pons then. "Her wagers and her investments have been far from matching the money she has borrowed—and I can say nothing of such securities as she may have taken to the banks."

"Did she in fact borrow against securities as well?" I asked.

"I think it highly likely that she did. There is everything to show that in her need to raise considerable sums of money, she explored every avenue before turning to securities that were not her own."

"Like Lord Heltsham's *Tamerlane*."

Pons nodded.

"But there is plenty of precedent for sudden changes in living patterns," I said. "Lady Heltsham is not the first woman who has suddenly altered her way of life; she will not be the last."

"In these matters I must defer to your judgment, Parker," said Pons dryly.

"What do you propose to do?" I asked. "After all, you've solved the matter as far as Bryant is concerned."

"True, true. But I have not satisfied myself. And at this point I have gone as far as I can go alone."

"If there is anything I can do," I began.

"I count on your loyalty always, Parker, but in this case, I need expert help. I have called upon Bancroft and commanded the power that is only the Foreign Office's. I have had to inform him in the strictest secrecy that I have reason to believe Lady Heltsham is the victim of a conspiracy that may involve espionage."

I studied his face to see whether he jested, but the grimness of his features gave me no alternative but to believe him. Nevertheless, I could not but express my amazement. "Surely not Lady Heltsham! Perhaps her husband."

"Lord Heltsham is on the Munitions Committee," said Pons significantly.

"But what can Bancroft do?"

"He has done what I asked, and discreetly. Lady Heltsham's mail will be opened and her telephone tapped. I need to know who communicates with her. Unless I am very much mistaken, she will receive a communication of some importance within twenty-four hours. I am prepared to act upon it."

"You astound me!" I cried.

"It is surely not the first time," said Pons, his eyes twinkling.

Early the next evening, Pons received from his brother the first copies of the letters delivered to Lady Heltsham during the day. He pounced upon it eagerly. There were nine letters in all; I could not see that Pons read most of them, only beginning each of them, and tossing it aside. But at last, when he came to the seventh one, he paused, read it at a glance, and smiled.

"I fancy this is what we want, Parker," he said, handing it to me.

It was but the briefest of notes.

"DEAR LADY,

"I count on your joining me tomorrow at two for a cocktail at Sardi's.

"VICTOR."

I looked up. "You cannot know the sender?"

"I fancy I do. He is Victor Affandi, a man about town. He is hardly more than an international gigolo, but highly popular with the ladies. He is of Egyptian descent, and lives at The Larches in Laburnum Crescent."

"You think him guilty of espionage?"

"I should not be surprised if he were. He is an ingenious man, one who has managed to live conspicuously well without visible means of support other than a small allowance left him many years ago. If you are not averse to an adventure in larceny, we shall pay his quarters a visit tomorrow afternoon."

I looked at Pons askance. "As your friend Bryant puts it, 'There's a smell of fish about this,' " I said. "What can you hope to find at Affandi's place?"

Pons smiled. "We shall see."

However much I may have been inclined to hold back, I was at



Pons's side next afternoon when his skeleton keys let him into the sumptuously furnished apartment occupied by Victor Affandi. Once the door was closed behind us, Pons stood quietly in the middle of the living-room examining our surroundings. His keen eyes darted from one to another of the framed pictures on the walls—some patently original watercolours and oils—until he came to one only a trifle out of line. He strode across the room and lifted the picture sufficiently to disclose a wall-safe.

He stood for a moment contemplating it, then gently lowered the picture. "Affandi could hardly be so obvious," he murmured.

He resumed his scrutiny of the room. He contemplated the furniture, but discarded this, too. He went around the rug, raising it for any evidence of a receptacle in the floor. He passed on into the kitchen, the bathroom, and the bedroom, examining each in turn before he came back into the living-room.

"We don't have much time," he said. "I daresay Affandi's cocktail engagement will be a cruelly short one."

Apart from the costliness of its appointments, the living-room was simply furnished. Pons examined the furniture, but only desultorily; clearly he did not believe that what he sought was hidden in it any more than he believed the wall-safe to be its place of concealment.

Finally, his eyes fixed upon a recessed shelf of books. He crossed to it, and I followed. The volumes Victor Affandi had collected were almost depressingly prosaic—a Forsyte novel by Galsworthy, a Proust volume in French, books by Dickens, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, the poems of Byron, and, somewhat incongruously, two oversized leatherbound volumes containing the Old and the New Testament. It was this two-volume edition of the Bible which had caught Pons's attention. His eyes quickened as he drew one of them from the shelf and opened it.

"An uncommonly light book for one of its size," he said. "I fancy this is what we are looking for, Parker."

He turned back the pages until he came at last to a page that would not turn—and the rest of the pages were solid. The book was a dummy.

Pons sought and found the tiny lever and unlatched the cover of the dummy portion, and the lid flew back. There lay disclosed papers, documents, packets of letters, and newspaper clippings.

Without a moment's hesitation, Pons dipped into Affandi's papers and proceeded methodically to stuff the contents of the book into his pockets.

"Pons, what are you doing?" I protested.

"Robbing Affandi of his treasures," said Pons blandly. "How many of his visitors would think of looking into a Bible!" he added, chuckling.

He locked the book, closed it, and returned it to its place on the shelf.

Then he took down the other book, which was also a dummy, and emptied this in similar fashion.

"Now, quickly, Parker, out of the place," he said.

In short order, we found ourselves back at our quarters. There Pons lost no time in sending a note to Lady Heltsham, inviting her to call at 7B at her convenience, and promising that she would learn something to her advantage. To all my questions, he turned a deaf ear, or worse, a scornful retort.

"It is as plain as a pikestaff, Parker. You disappoint me. You began so well in this matter, and you have been misled so easily."

He spent the next two hours, spurning supper, making an inventory of the contents of Victor Affandi's Bible. Some of the papers and letters he slipped into manila envelopes and addressed them for posting; some he put aside for further examination.

Lady Heltsham presented herself promptly at eight o'clock. She entered our rooms with understandable reserve, and as she threw back the veil which covered her features it was patent that she was under tension not untouched by indignation.

"Ah, my dear Lady Heltsham," said Pons, "I owe you an apology for that little substitution I played upon you. Nevertheless, it has led to a result I am sure you will agree is a happy one for you. I believe these belong to you."

So saying, he handed her a packet of letters from Victor Affandi's collection.

For a few moments she gazed wide-eyed at the letters Pons held out to her. Then she seized hold of them with trembling hands, and her liquidly beautiful eyes stared uncomprehendingly at Pons.

"Pray make sure they are all there," urged Pons.

She untied them eagerly and went through the packet. She nodded as if she did not trust herself to speak.

Pons turned and indicated the fire on the hearth. "I assure your ladyship I have not read them, but surely their nature is such that it would be dangerous for you even to carry them home."

She crossed to the fire and threw the letters into the flames. Then she turned and fell back against the mantel with a great sobbing sigh of relief.

"Oh, Mr. Pons!" she cried. "I cannot thank you enough. I cannot

pay you. I cannot tell you how much this has meant to me. If my husband had learned of them — as *he* threatened. . . ."

"Pray say no more, Lady Heltsham. If I may retain that spurious *Tamerlane*, I shall feel amply repaid."

"Please do!" she said earnestly. "Thank you, sir. I am happy to learn there are still gentlemen left in England!"

She bade us good-night and slipped away.

"A woman of rare discretion," said Pons. "You will note she asked no questions, but accepted gratefully what fate had been kind enough to offer her."

"So it was blackmail," I said, chagrined. "Why then all this talk of espionage?"

"My brother would hardly have responded to anything other," said Pons. "You ought not to have responded to it at all. It was surely obvious that only the most pressing matter could have caused Lady Heltsham to pawn her valuables and then to take the extreme measure of borrowing money against his lordship's genuine *Tamerlane*. Affandi must have taken a tidy sum from her. Men of his stamp never know an end to greed. I knew he could not resist the chance to make new demands upon her when he read the story of her inheritance, and I was certain his approach to her would be made very quickly, as it was."

"And the letters Affandi held?"

Pons shrugged. "I submit they were the customary letters of a woman in love unwise enough to put down in her own handwriting things which ought never to have been written at all. Affandi learned of their existence somehow, and probably bought them. Knowing that she could not afford to have her husband know of their existence, he proceeded with methodical cold-bloodedness to blackmail her." He picked up the spurious *Tamerlane*, his eyes dancing. "I am delighted to add this curious memento to my little collection of items associated with what you call my adventures in deduction — with Mr. Bryant's permission, of course."

## *The Adventure of the Rydberg Numbers*

I HAVE HESITATED many years before setting forth the curious events concerning the disappearance of the left-handed physicist which occupied the attention of my friend, Solar Pons, in the same year in the 1920s which saw us through the incredible case of the fantastic horror at Birlstone and the baffling problem of the Swedenborg Signatures. But the march of scientific progress has voided the qualms which prevented me from yielding heretofore to the inclination to chronicle this unique adventure.

It began, as I recall, one October morning. I had risen early, only to find Pons already at the breakfast-table, and bearing every evidence of having been up for at least an hour. My companion looked at me with dancing eyes.

"You are just in time, Parker. We are about to have a most distinguished visitor."

"At this hour?" I protested.

"His step is on the stair."

There was indeed a heavy tread on the stairs leading to our quarters.

"Who is it?" I asked. "The Prime Minister?"

Pons shook his head. "One who is far more seldom seen in these rooms."

"Not His Majesty!"

Pons chuckled. "I am always at His Majesty's command without requesting his presence here."

The door to our quarters was unceremoniously flung open to reveal the portly, almost massive figure of my companion's brother, Bancroft. His eyes were even sleepier than on the one previous occasion I had seen him some years before, regarding the curious behaviour of the reclusive cryptographer, Ricoletti. He came but slightly forward into the room, pushed his cane firmly to the floor, and looked from one to the other of us.

"I detest above all things being awakened at such a barbaric hour," he said peevishly.

"For my part, I welcome any hour of the day or night which may offer me some little problem in human travail," replied my com-

panion. "It takes none of my powers to conclude that only such a problem would have brought you to our humble quarters. I am surprised that the Foreign Office permitted your sleep to be disturbed."

"It has nothing to do with the Foreign Office," retorted Bancroft. "You are not at your best at this hour, Solar. Since it is too early for any activity at the Foreign Office, it is patent that no event or circumstance arising from my modest position there brings me here. No, sir, confound it, I have been aroused from my bed by a hysterical young woman, and I am persuaded it is you she wishes to see, not me."

"How did she come to you?"

"I have some acquaintance with her brother. It is he who seems to have disappeared."

"Ah, at last we are coming to the matter in hand."

"I have the young lady below in a cab. I should tell you she has defective eyesight; she is partially blind, in fact. Her name is Lillian Pargeter. She is under considerable strain."

"By all means, let her come up!" cried Pons.

"Before I fetch her, does the name *Rydberg* convey anything to you, Solar?"

Pons tugged at his left ear and sat for a moment with closed eyes. "I believe that Per Axel Rydberg is or has been until recently the curator of the New York Botanical Garden. . . ."

"I doubt that he would be the one."

"Then there was Abraham Viktor Rydberg, who died in 1895, a Swedish novelist and writer on various subjects. Swedish Academy in 1877, I believe, and professor of ecclesiastical history at Stockholm from 1884 onward. He was for many years on the staff of the *Göteborgs Handels-och sjöfartstidning*, where such novels as his *The Freebooter on the Baltic* and *The Last of the Athenians* appeared. He wrote poems, ecclesiastical studies, and various other tomes, among them *Magic in the Middle Ages*."

"Surely it is not he!" exclaimed Bancroft testily. "And *Mendelyeev*?"

"Dmitri Ivanovich Mendelyeev, author of the Periodic Law, the standard table."

"Quite probably that is the man. The missing man seems to have been at work on some problem involving physics or physical chemistry. Physics and chemistry are not my forte, as you know, Solar. Pargeter was employed by the government in research. To

the best of my knowledge, he was not involved in any major project. He is considered by the department a minor if persevering physicist and has a record of competence, but not brilliance. He is a man of thirty-five; his sister is somewhat younger."

"He is, in short, a person of little consequence in the eyes of the government," said Pons. "Let us just have a talk with the young lady."

"I'll get her," I offered.

"Pray do," replied Bancroft, obviously relieved. "Seventeen steps to these rooms! I am not given to running needlessly up and down them."

I descended to the street and opened the door of the cab on a not unattractive young woman, with dark hair and pale blue eyes. She was one of those fine-featured young women so typical of certain areas of England, though the thick-lensed glasses she was required to wear lent her fragile face an oddly owl-like appearance. I introduced myself and took her slender hand in mine to help her from the cab and up the stairs into our quarters.

"Ah, Miss Pargeter," said Pons, coming to meet her and conduct her to a seat near the fireplace. "Sit here and tell us what has alarmed you."

"It is about my brother, Stanley," she began. "He said to me not long ago, if anything was to happen to him, I should see Mr. Pons. I understood him to mean Mr. Bancroft Pons, but I may be in error. Oh, dear! I am so upset!"

"Pray take your time, Miss Pargeter," said Pons persuasively.

Bancroft Pons snorted impatiently.

"I have no doubt my brother has not been at his best," Pons continued. "I beg you to overlook his idiosyncrasies. You must understand Bancroft has a position of some importance in the government."

"The object of this gathering is to inquire into the circumstances concerning the disappearance of Stanley Pargeter," observed Bancroft with icy detachment. "I suggest you get on with it, Solar."

"How long has your brother been gone, Miss Pargeter?" asked Pons.

"Oh, that is the trouble, Mr. Pons. I don't know. I think it has been all of two days now, perhaps three, but I cannot be sure."

Pons glanced quizzically at his brother, but Bancroft flickered not an eyelash.

"I know you'll think me hysterical or mad. I assure you I am

not. As you have surely seen, I cannot see very well. My brother and I have lived together at Number 27 Conant Place for the past four years, and I believe I know him very well. I am accustomed to his step, his manner, his actions. It would be difficult to deceive me. Yet just such an attempt has been made. I could not be positive until last night, but then I grew certain, and I could not wait to see you. I know something dreadful has happened to Stanley, and I beg you to find him."

"Something took place last night to increase your certainty?" prompted Pons.

"Forgive me, I am distraught. Yes, a little thing. He took hold of my hands. Then I knew this man who had lived in our house for at least two days and perhaps three was not Stanley. You see, Mr. Pons, Stanley is left-handed. This man, too, appeared to be left-handed. But when he took hold of my hands last night, I felt there were more calluses on his right hand than on his left. That isn't true of Stanley. Yet in every other respect, I had thought him to be Stanley—perhaps with a slight change here or there, true, but nothing of great consequence. His voice, for instance, suggested that he was coming down with a cold; I have heard Stanley sound just so. His manner was identical, he was as considerate as Stanley has always been, and even the sound of his walk rang true most of the time. In appearance, he certainly resembled Stanley. But I know now it is not he. And I know that something has happened to Stanley, something he may have expected.

"I cannot imagine what it can be. I have wracked my poor brain in an effort to discover anything he might have said to me. But it is only his request about you that comes to mind. And his work."

"What work, Miss Pargeter?"

"Mr. Pons, Stanley's work was not really important. It was what he did at home that seemed to matter to him."

"Did he speak of it?"

"No, Mr. Pons. He would have thought I could not understand, and I am sure he was right. But one evening I came silently into his rooms, and I heard him say to himself, 'Ten to one the old man didn't know what he had!' I thought this of no consequence, for Stanley is by nature solitary, and I interrupted him on the matter about which I had sought his advice, and went out again. But recently he spoke quite often of people named Rydberg, Balmer, Mendelyeev, Bohr, and others with whom I am not familiar, I am sorry to say. He has spoken so much, too, with some excitement of

something he called quanta and the Rydberg numbers and constants, but it is all beyond me."

Pons sat for a long minute with his head sunk on his chest in an attitude of deep concentration.

"Who were your brother's associates, Miss Pargeter?"

"He had none, Mr. Pons."

"He did not go out of an evening?"

"On occasion, yes." She spoke doubtfully. "Our father left us a competence. There was no need for Stanley to work, but he has always been keenly interested in chemistry and physics, and he wished to do so for his own gratification. We have few friends, but we do occasionally go out to parties, usually among friends in the Putney and Chelsea areas. Seldom anywhere else. They are always rather private parties, though not limited in size as much as I would like. But perhaps I am too sensitive about my affliction."

"Yet your brother himself had no particular friend, no confidante?"

"If he had, I know of none. I should be inclined to doubt that people would take kindly to Stanley. Please do not misunderstand me; I don't mean to disparage him. I mean only he is so engrossed in his work that he had no interest in talking of anything else, and he is therefore a very poor listener."

Again Pons appeared to muse for a few moments in silence. Presently he asked, "It was two or three days ago when you first became suspicious, Miss Pargeter. Why?"

"Yes, sir." She clenched one hand and made a futile gesture. "Oh, it's difficult to explain, Mr. Pons. Perhaps it was nothing more than intuition. People who are deficient in one of the senses are often compensated by a sharpening of those which remain unimpaired. Perhaps it is so with me. I *felt* that something was wrong with Stanley; I didn't dream at first it was not Stanley who was with me, for he seemed no different from his usual self. Until last night. Then, of course, I knew."

She spoke with such assurance that it was not easy to doubt her. Glancing at my companion, I saw his keen eyes alight with interest. Bancroft Pons, for all the sleepiness of his expression, was no less alert. Both men appeared to be waiting upon Miss Pargeter's words with more than ordinary attention.

"Mr. Pons, what am I to do?" she cried.

"I fear yours is a most difficult task, my dear young lady," replied Pons immediately. "You must return home as if nothing had taken



place, and you must conduct yourself without a single betrayal of your doubts."

"Oh, I cannot!"

"I am sorely afraid you have no alternative. I may say that your brother's fate rests on your doing so."

"Mr. Pons, it will be beyond me."

Pons was inexorable. "For his sake, perhaps for your own, there is no other way. Your substitute brother is employed as usual?"

"Yes. He goes and comes just as Stanley did."

"Very well then. I will call on you in the course of the day. Let us now waste not a further moment."

Bancroft came to his feet with cat-like grace. "I will see you to the cab, Miss Pargeter," he announced.

Thus impelled, our client had no other course but to take her leave.

"Is that not a singular occurrence, Parker?" asked Pons, while yet their steps sounded on the stairs.

"It would seem to be a hallucination. I believe they are not uncommon in cases where there is a clear diminution of one of the senses."

Pons clucked in disapproval. "Dear me, you medical gentlemen find it difficult to credit the unusual. Why are the scientific gentry always so ready to dismiss the admittedly inexplicable and substitute a rationalization which negates the evidence? I submit that our client is a young lady of more than ordinary intelligence, of some considerable perception, refreshingly free of unnecessary emotionalism, and not at all given to hallucinations."

"Hallucinations!" echoed Bancroft Pons, who had come silently back up to the threshold. "Bosh and twaddle! That young lady suffered none. But whoever made off with her brother must indeed have been labouring under illusions."

"Why do you say so?" asked Pons.

"Come, come," said Bancroft impatiently. "Had he gone of his own free will, there would have been no need of a substitute. His sister is not a child; she could have been told if he wished to go away. Since there was a substitute, Pargeter was abducted. If so, the abduction must be concerned with his work. He could hardly have been mistaken for anyone else—but stay! there is young Samuel Pargitton, who is at work on bacteriological warfare."

Pons smiled. "You have eliminated him, surely. I submit that such an elaborate attempt at deception could not have been made in error, and could have been done only to prevent anyone from

taking note of Pargeter's absence. Have you enough personal acquaintance with Pargeter's work to be assured that it could not be of interest to any foreign power?"

"Certainly. I have all our men at my fingertips."

Pons smiled again. "But how many chemists, foreign agents, intriguers, physicists, and experts in the various fields of interest to our Foreign Office can occupy your fingertips? That must surely be a question as academic and incapable of solution as the number of angels believed to be able to occupy the point of a pin. Ninety, was it not? There are more chemists than that, to say nothing of the others. The experts always abound."

"The hour is too early for this kind of sport, Solar," said Bancroft testily. "Let us have done with it. The man did routine work. Consider, if he had not done so, a substitute might not have been so readily put forward. A consummate actor, after studying Pargeter for weeks, perhaps months, might readily deceive all who knew him; but if precise and specialized knowledge were required of him in so restricted a field as that in which Pargeter worked, he could hardly hope to excel in this, also. No, in this I brook no question; Pargeter's work was routine, no more. But the matter in hand would seem to be one of importance."

"Of the utmost importance," added Pons. "No pains have been spared to deceive Miss Pargeter and prevent knowledge of her brother's disappearance. It is evident that Stanley was thoroughly and comprehensively studied over a considerable period of time. We are faced with the obligation of inquiring whether the missing man has access to any vital information."

"None."

"Then if his vocation offers nothing, perhaps his avocation?"

"Were they not the same? I believe Miss Pargeter said as much."

"The field is not so restricted as you suppose," said Pons, waving toward his corner table filled with retorts and chemicals.

"Our German friends have an expressive word for this: *Kinderspiel*," interrupted Bancroft. "I shall expect to hear from you in good time, Solar. In deference to you, I shall have Pargeter's work re-examined; if I have not sent word to you by midday, you may consider that his position offers us nothing of possible interest pointing toward a solution of the riddle. Let us hope that the game will not be too long afoot."

With that, Pons's distinguished brother took his leave.

Pons turned merry eyes on me. "I fear Bancroft is irritated. Something has escaped him. We shall have no word from him."

"You are certainly confident," I said.

"I submit that our client's brother's status is not one which enlists the profound interest of the Foreign Office. The question which instantly occurs is—why not? I daresay it is for the very reason my brother has set forth—his work is not important. Of the nature of his work we have had some hint—radiation of heat and light. Now this strikes me as a field with most interesting possibilities, though it is admittedly difficult to grasp at the moment just how Stanley Pargeter may have come across information which might conceivably be of concern to someone other than an academician. I fancy our next move is an examination of Pargeter's home."

So saying, Pons retreated into meditative silence. From time to time, he looked into certain of his reference books; now and then he sawed away at his violin, which was a great trial to anyone within earshot, for whatever his talents, Pons was not a violinist; on occasion he dipped into his files. He was roused by nothing of the immediate mundane world, neither the familiar street sounds nor the ringing of our own telephone when a patient called me.

He proved correct in his assumption that there would be no further word from his brother, though he did him the courtesy of waiting upon him until noon, when, after a light repast set before us by Mrs. Johnson, he announced his intention of calling upon our client without further delay.

Our goal proved to be a rather old-fashioned house of two storeys, well-appointed, but clearly a dwelling which belonged to another era. Obviously it had been the home of our client's parents, and had at one time been an imposing residence. Miss Pargeter had been expecting us. She seemed now somewhat more composed than she had been in the morning, but she was still plainly under strain.

"Oh, I am so glad you've come, Mr. Pons," she cried. "I've been wracking my poor brain to find some explanation, but I'm more puzzled than ever. My poor brother can assuredly not be of interest to anyone. Why, he has been going on to his friends for months, for trying years, about the numbers. . . ."

"What numbers?" asked Pons sharply.

"The Rydberg numbers, as I'm sure I told you," she replied.

"Tell me, Miss Pargeter, has your brother's substitute in any considerable way altered his books and papers?"

"I fear I would not be able to say. Would you like to see his room?"

"By all means."

Our client took us upstairs and ushered us into a spacious room, which bore an appearance of some disorder.

"My brother is not a tidy person," explained Miss Pargeter.

Pons went immediately to a large and handsome, but obviously battered desk which was littered with papers in every conceivable disarray. Some of them had overflowed into a capacious wastepaper-basket at one side of the desk; others were piled with comparative neatness at the far side. There was every evidence to show that many of the papers had been removed from the desk drawers, some of which stood open. Books lay carelessly face up or down among the papers, so that, at cursory inspection, the desk bore the look of utter confusion.

Pons, however, showed none of the bewilderment I felt. He seated himself at the desk and attacked the papers with the utmost caution, careful to disturb none of them. His keen eyes flickered rapidly from one to another, as he turned each over following his scrutiny. Some failed to hold him; indeed, most of them were apparently trivial by nature. But there were a few papers which he put aside.

Miss Pargeter watched him in perplexity. She looked to me from time to time for some explanation of his conduct, but there was nothing I could reply save to reassure her silently as best I could.

Pons was at Pargeter's desk for a most wearing hour. Miss Pargeter finally took her leave of us, descending to the floor below, and when Pons completed his perusal of Stanley Pargeter's papers, he bestowed upon the rest of the room only the most superficial of examinations before following our client.

"Miss Pargeter," he began without preamble, "I have appropriated several of your brother's papers. Since these were in the pile on the left end of the desk, I am quite certain they will not be missed by your brother's substitute, who must be kept free of your suspicion at all costs until we have come upon the track of your brother. Now, you have mentioned Stanley's attendance at social events and especially his propensity for talking of his work. Did you have reference to his employment or his studies at home?"

"Oh, what he did at home, Mr. Pons. He talked of this interminably."

"So that anyone attending a party also attended by your brother might have heard him when he spoke of his work?"

"Mr. Pons, my brother spoke to everyone. I'm afraid he was most

trying. He seemed to be unable to gain an ear in quarters associated with his work, since his theories were—I am sure, quite properly—dismissed as untenable, and therefore he felt impelled to speak of them to anyone who would listen, and, I fear, many who would rather not have listened.”

“Could you possibly recall the names of people to whom your brother broached his beliefs?” asked Pons. “I suggest, of course, only those who appeared to be willing listeners, and who gave him time enough in which to understand him.”

Miss Pargeter looked dubious. “I’m afraid it would be very difficult.”

“Pray do your best. I shall need also a photograph of your brother. I will expect you to communicate with me in the morning.”

On this note we took our departure.

Once back at 7B, Pons went straight to his small library of books pertinent to physics and chemistry. He was soon lost in Sir Richard Glazebrook’s *Dictionary of Applied Physics*, so lost, indeed, that he refused dinner, much to Mrs. Johnson’s indignation. His table rapidly came to bear an aspect similar to the desk in the room of the missing man, for Pons was studying the papers he had taken from that room in relation to data he assimilated from the books at his command.

All evening he sat in uncommunicative silence, as if the very walls of the room had ceased to exist for him, together with all else within them save the papers and books at his fingertips. His meditation was profound, and by the hour of my retirement, he had begun to cover sheets of paper with his jottings.

It was so I found him still at dawn. He had gone without sleep, but he now sat before a table in less disorder than it had been on the previous evening. He had arranged some of his papers and had brewed a pot of tea for himself. His eyes, when he met my reproving glance, were bright.

“Pray spare me the medical point of view on loss of sleep, Parker,” he said crisply. “I have had before me a singular and most tantalizing task, and one, I regret to say, without positive solution. I have been trying to arrive at some conclusion about the subject which occupied Pargeter.”

“I’m afraid you’re off on a wild goose chase, Pons,” I said. “Everyone—including his sister and your brother—is convinced that

Pargeter is at best an enthusiast without much to lend credence to his views—at worst, a profound bore.”

“I submit that not quite everyone is so convinced, Parker,” replied Pons. “Myself, for one. For another, that gentleman who had sufficient foresight to bring about Pargeter’s abduction. I fancy we are all too prone to accept the opinion of the majority; it may be in error. It frequently is. Let us suppose, on the contrary, that Pargeter has hit upon something.”

“The majority,” I said with asperity, “are entirely likely to be right.”

Pons smiled tolerantly. “Ah, I should hesitate to commit myself to the mercy of the majority,” he answered. “In this case everyone seems to take it for granted that Pargeter’s theories, whatever they are, are untenable. You know my methods, Parker. Let us assume that the contrary is true.”

“The experts. . . .”

“With all due respect for science—and none is more fulsome in his praise of the scientific method than I, you must agree—I confess to a profound distrust of ‘experts.’ ”

At this juncture, Mrs. Johnson knocked and came in with our breakfast on a tray. The good woman had doubled Pons’s portions, explaining with an injured air that inasmuch as Pons had not eaten his dinner the previous night, he would need the extra. Pons hailed her appearance volubly, and gently praised her generous breakfast, so that she went out beaming with pleasure.

“Now, then,” said Pons, brusquely pushing his breakfast to one side, “take a look at this. What do you make of it?”

He pushed toward me one of the papers I recognized as among those he had found on Pargeter’s desk. On it was written a curious series of figures and letters:

$${}^{\circ}\text{N}/\text{c} \text{ (equal to } 109,677.76 \text{ cm.}^{-1}\text{)}$$

$${}^{\circ}\text{N} - 3.28888 + 10^{15}$$

$${}^{\circ}n = n_o - N$$

$$\frac{\quad}{(m + u)^2}$$

“These would seem to be formulae,” I ventured.

“Capital, capital!” exclaimed Pons. “These are Rydberg numbers. N over c is the Rydberg constant, with the numerical value of

N as stated. The reference is to the theory of radiation of heat or light. I fear the matter is too complicated to permit of precise explication, regrettably. Its beginning lies in the measurement of the distinct lines or bands occupying definite positions, which is to say, showing definite wavelengths, given off by gases and vapours heated to incandescence, and visible under spectroscopic examination. J. J. Balmer, as early as 1885, set down the atomic spectrum of hydrogen. The Rydberg constant was pronounced subsequently, following upon which came Planck's quantum theory, and Ritz's principle of combination, which gave us the Rydberg-Ritz Formula. The experiments of Niels Bohr, Paschen, Rutherford and, not long ago, Brackett, have added to our store of information about radiation.

"Some of the theories which have been advanced are considered revolutionary and radical by scientists the world over. Rutherford's postulate that electrons rotate rapidly about a nucleus, so that outward centrifugal force balances the inward attractive force, for instance—Niels Bohr's suggestion that an electron always moves in a closed orbit, without absorption or emission of radiation, a theory enunciated only a little over a decade ago, were not set forth without encountering very strong opposition."

"Surely this is all in textbooks," I interrupted. "I acknowledge it is out of my depth."

"Yes, it can be found in Glazebrook."

"In that case, what would Pargeter have to offer which could not be more readily ascertained than by abducting him?"

Pons smiled enigmatically. "It does not occur to you that Pargeter may just possibly have gone beyond the lines of thought suggested by the developments outlined by Messrs. Balmer, Rydberg, Bohr, et al.?"

"Pray inform me where such developments could lead?"

"Ah, Parker, I fear I am incapable of doing so. At best I have certain tenuous suspicions, little more. But is it not tantalizing to consider that scientific thought in regard to certain fundamentals may be in error and these radical gentlemen may be right?"

"Oh, that's the dream of every dabbler in physics and chemistry," I retorted. "And Pargeter is surely no more than that."

"Is he? I wonder."

"You have certain tenuous suspicions. What are they?"

"Well, suppose that further experiments lend support to the radical theories thus far outlined and lead some scientists to con-

clude that certain of our fundamental scientific laws are not, after all, unalterable."

"For example?"

"The law regarding the fissionability of the atom."

"My dear Pons!" I protested. "Here we are a quarter of the way into the twentieth century. For decades, our greatest authorities, living as well as dead, have held to the unshakable belief in the indivisibility of the atom. This is not my field; neither is it yours."

"No, it is Pargeter's," said Pons dryly.

At this moment the outer bell rang, and in a few moments Mrs. Johnson trudged into the room with a letter for Pons, which had just arrived by special messenger.

Pons tore open the envelope and glanced at the single sheet of paper it contained, ignoring for the moment the photograph of our quarry which fell to the table. "Ah!" he cried, "here is a list of names from Miss Pargeter." His eye went down the paper. "Sir Hilary Saunders—no, of course not. Nelson Warrender—no, it cannot be he." He read for a few moments in silence. "Ahal Crandall Barrington. I fancy that is our man."

"Why do you say so? Is he not the actor?"

Pons nodded, as he drew his breakfast toward him at last.

"What would a minor actor know of such abstruse scientific matters?"

"One of Barrington's closest friends during the past twelvemonth has been Karl Heinrichs, who is on the staff of the German Embassy," answered Pons.

"You are surely not suggesting that the German ambassador is implicated in Pargeter's disappearance!" I protested.

"There is only one man in London who conceivably has the imagination to suspect that Pargeter may have got on to the track of something, and at the same time the determination to find out what it is and the skill and ingenuity necessary to have accomplished his abduction in the manner in which it was done. He is not in any obvious way connected with the German Embassy. Yet he is an espionage agent employed by the German government. He moves freely in social circles and lives near Putney, in a somewhat secluded house where he entertains lavishly now and then. I refer to Baron Manfred von und zu Grafenstein."

"A notoriously fanciful dilettante who poses as a patron of the arts," I said, unable to conceal my dubiety.

"And a consummate actor. Heinrichs is his friend. I do not doubt



that Barrington spoke of Pargeter and his theories to Heinrichs, and Heinrichs in turn carried information to von Grafenstein, whose imagination is not bound by the traditional acceptance of scientific fundamentals."

"But what could he gain from Pargeter?"

"The direction of Pargeter's theories and/or experiments, if any have been made, which I am inclined to doubt, knowing the stuffiness of departmental heads. These can be transmitted to scientists in Germany, who may be more open to suggestion than our own men."

"He could hardly hope to get Pargeter out of the country."

"Not without exposing his hand. No," Pons shook his head, "if indeed he has taken Pargeter, he will have him imprisoned at his home. Consider the advantages of von Grafenstein's gambit. Not only would Pargeter be unable to say just where he had been kept, but he would not even be able to prove he had been abducted, since a dozen people could testify that he had been at home and at work with unfailing regularity. Pargeter can be kept away from work indefinitely; von Grafenstein has no reason to suspect that Pargeter's absence has been noticed. If Miss Lillian Pargeter were to betray alarm, her brother's double could immediately notify his employer, and Pargeter could be returned. If, that is, there is any thought of returning him," Pons added darkly.

"What is your next step, then?"

"I fear it is one I cannot take. It is one the government will not take. Moreover, the tribulations and ramifications of going to Scotland Yard are insufferably delaying. No, I fancy this is a matter for the boys. It is Guy Fawkes's Night; the time could not be more ideal. I shall send for Alfred Peake."

By Pons's reference to "the boys" I understood that he meant the group of gamins he called his Praed Street Irregulars. They were a little army of street urchins, ranging in age from eight or nine years to fifteen, alert and venturesome lads who would do anything within reason for a shilling or two. Alfred Peake was their acknowledged leader; it was through him that Pons was accustomed to dispatching his assignments.

Promptly within an hour, Alfred presented himself. Pons's message had found him in school, he had obtained an excuse, and here he was. He was a bright-eyed boy of about thirteen, though small for his age, and he stood before Pons now with his arms akimbo and his eyes alight with anticipation.

"Alfred, my lad, I have a little task for you," said Pons. "I shall need a dozen to a score of dependable boys. Can you find them?"

"I think so, Mr. Pons."

"Capital! Today is Guy Fawkes's. How many of the boys, do you think, will have masks, guys, and enough fireworks?"

Alfred looked dubious. "I don't think many will, sir."

"Very well, then. I shall entrust you with five pounds with which to equip yourselves. Now, then, take a look at this photograph."

Alfred obediently bent over the photograph of Stanley Pargeter which his sister had sent to Pons. He studied it carefully.

"Do you think you could recognize this man if you saw him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let us suppose, as is not unlikely, that you encounter him in bed, with his face bandaged."

Alfred looked dismayed.

"If I told you it was necessary to do so, could you bring yourself to tear off the bandages to see whether it was he?"

Alfred grinned and nodded.

"Ah, willing lad! Now, then, look here."

Pons spread before him a map of the London area folded to show the section covering Putney. "Can you find Waverton Street?"

"Yes, sir," said Alfred, after but a few moments, and put his finger on it.

"Good! Now there is a certain house on that street, Number Twelve. I believe the man we want is in that house. He is being held a prisoner there against his will. He may be locked in a room. He may be abed under guard. He may be under a sedative."

"Doped, sir?"

Pons smiled. "Doped, Alfred. We want this man. I may say, Alfred, our government wants him."

"What do you want us to do, Mr. Pons?"

"Between nine and ten o'clock, I suggest that you boys venture down Waverton Street in masks and with your guys and make a nuisance of yourselves. At Number Twelve, however, I shall expect you to invade the house. I'm afraid you may have to be quite rough. Can you find yourselves some sandbags?"

"I think so, sir."

"Capital! Don't hesitate to use them. I'm afraid they must be used on all the occupants of the house. I cannot say how many men may be there. Perhaps as many as five, perhaps but two. Our quarry is in all likelihood among them. I need hardly say you are not to use

the bags on him. Proceed with discretion, my lad, and caution. I shouldn't like any one of you to be shot."

Alfred's eyes widened, but not with apprehension.

"This man is to be found. The house must be searched from top to bottom. They will not suspect an army of roistering children until it is too late. Once you find him, bring him with you. We will be waiting in a Daimler limousine just around the corner from Waverton Street. As soon as you've delivered him, abandon your masks and the guys and scatter. Are you willing to undertake the assignment, Alfred?"

"Yes, sir," responded the lad eagerly.

"Very well. You may promise the boys a guinea each. Whether you succeed or fail, you may present yourself here tomorrow for your reward. Take the photograph with you, so there may be no mistake. Now be off with you."

"Pons, this is madness," I protested, once Alfred Peake had gone clattering down the stairs.

"Ah, I thought it rather ingenious myself," answered Pons. "Now I shall require only Bancroft's assistance. I shall want a government car which is not likely to be stopped between Putney and Praed Street, in case of a flaw in the arrangement."

A few minutes after nine o'clock that night, Pons, his brother Bancroft, and I, were sitting in a darkened Daimler limousine which bore certain official insignia which would guarantee us uninterrupted passage through London. Waverton Street crossed behind us. Pons's brother had complained bitterly at Pons's tactics, but had interposed no obstruction. Within ten minutes of the time of our arrival at our post, a small army of boys in Guy Fawkes's masks, wheeling guys on barrows and in perambulators, materialized and swept down the street.

Soon there was a veritable bedlam of noise. Doorbells were rung, the boys performed on various unmusical instruments, and ran shouting and crying from house to house. There must have been easily twenty of them or more. Pons sat unresponsive to Bancroft's muttering plaint about the discomfort he suffered; once, in the glow of my cigarette, I saw Pons's face masked with a Sphinx-like grin.

The bedlam receded down the street and diminished.

"Ah, they have got in," murmured Pons. "There was always the off-chance that no one would answer the assault on the door."

Five minutes passed with interminable slowness. Ten.

Then the bedlam resumed, sweeping back toward the corner where we waited. The noise increased, exactly as before it had diminished, and abruptly the horde of boys swept around the corner and bore straight down upon the car. In their midst stumbled one who was taller, clad in white, and apparently similarly crowned.

Pons was out of the car in a flash.

The boys gave way to him. Within a moment Pons was pushing his quarry into the Daimler. After them came one of the boys, who, when his mask was doffed, was revealed as Alfred Peake.

"Mr. Stanley Pargeter, I presume," said Pons. "Allow me. Solar Pons, at your service. We are accompanied by my brother, Bancroft, whom you may know, and my companion, Dr. Lyndon Parker. Pray wrap yourself in this blanket."

The car was already drawing away. Of the Praed Street Irregulars there was no sign; they had melted into the night.

"They must have torn my skin, taking off those bandages," Pargeter said ruefully.

"Sorry, sir," said Alfred. "We were in a hurry, and couldn't tell how many more men might be in the house."

"How many were there, Alfred?" asked Pons.

"Three, sir — not counting this one."

"They gave you trouble?"

"Yes, sir. The last one had a gun. The tall man opened the door. A chauffeur, he was. Whitey hit him and he went down. We met the next one on the stairs. He was fooled, too. But the last one — he was in the hall upstairs — he had the gun. He almost stopped us, but Mick Green — he's the one always reading cowboy stories from the States — he lassoed the gun. We tied him up. Then we found him here, in bed, like you guessed he might be."

"We will hear more of this from von Grafenstein," murmured Bancroft Pons.

"I doubt it," answered Pons. "Instruct the driver to go round and drop Alfred at his home."

Back at 7B, Stanley Pargeter revealed himself as a thin, pale-faced young man who clearly took himself with challenging seriousness. I was able to outfit him with some clothing, and helped clear his head of the bandages which remained, for Alfred had torn away only enough of them to assure himself that he had found his

quarry. Bancroft waited with mounting impatience until Pargeter could tell his story.

He had been abducted in the simplest way imaginable. Hailing a cab, he had got in to find it already occupied. He knew nothing more until he awoke in a strange bed. Since then he had been questioned daily. At first he had been told he had had an accident; he had talked freely. But then, as the tenor of the questions became apparent to him, he had said nothing more. He had not as yet been mistreated, but there had been certain disquieting signs. Nor had he been allowed to see anyone, or even to view those who questioned him, for his eyes had been kept bandaged.

"Now, Mr. Pargeter," said Pons, when the young man had finished his recital, "let me ask about the direction of your theories. My brother, as you know, is connected with the Foreign Office."

Pargeter looked somewhat dubious. His pale eyes glanced from one to the other of them. "I've been ridiculed so often, Mr. Pons," he said at last, "I hardly know what to say. I'm convinced that not even this attempt to extract information from me about my line of thought will convince my superiors that it's worth following. I am exploring radical ground."

"So much seemed apparent," said Pons. "Let me guess. I have examined some of your papers. As perhaps you know, I am not bound by the beliefs of your departmental heads. I do not recognize the impossible until all other avenues have been closed. Judging by the papers left in your home, you are working toward research tending to show that the nucleus of the atom is not necessarily always profoundly stable."

Pargeter grinned. "Somewhere, Mr. Pons, there must be an atom with a nucleus sufficiently unstable to be fissionable."

Pons looked toward his brother with dancing eyes.

"I am afraid the government holds your views untenable, Mr. Pargeter," said Bancroft.

"I know it, sir. But I'm far from convinced they *are* untenable. I'm certain they'll give my views no more hearing now than before."

"I am convinced they will not," assented Bancroft.

Pons interrupted. "You gave some of these theories to your captors, Mr. Pargeter?"

"None of any importance, I am sure."

"Nevertheless, would that not be a treasonable act, Bancroft?" asked Pons.

"I believe it would," agreed Bancroft, a cunning smile beginning to show at his lips.

"So that it might be the wisest course to charge Stanley Pargeter with giving information to foreign agents and put him under immediate detention to be held incommunicado and tried under the Official Secrets Act."

Pargeter looked at him, startled.

"I will have it done," said Bancroft.

"Pray do not be alarmed, Mr. Pargeter," said Pons. "I refer to the man who has been occupying your home and your position as your double since your abduction. As for yourself, I fancy there is a gentleman in America who may appreciate your talents. If you have no objection, I will give you his name and address. Our American cousins may be less traditional in these matters than our own scientists."

Pargeter left for the United States within a fortnight, and, as events in the years that followed amply proved, Pons was correct in his estimate of our American cousins' appreciation of Stanley Pargeter and his radical theories.

## *The Adventure of the Praed Street Irregulars*

SOLAR PONS raised his head suddenly from the chess problem he had been contemplating. His feral face was alert.

"Surely that was the scrape of a cycle against the kerb!" he said.

"This April wind makes enough noise to drown out everything else," I answered.

But even as I spoke, the outer door opened and banged shut, and a clatter of footsteps pounded up the stairs.

"That's one of the boys," said Pons, referring to his Praed Street Irregulars—that little band of street urchins whom he called upon to assist him from time to time. "Alfred—he steps more heavily than Pinky or Roger."

The door to our quarters burst open. Alfred Peake stood there, a wildness in his eyes.

"Mr. Pons!" he cried. "The boy's gone. He's been took."

"Come in, Alfred. Pray compose yourself. What boy is this?"

"Our orphan, Mr. Pons. He's ours. We adopted him. Now he's been took."

Pons pushed back his chess game, got to his feet, and went over to close the door behind Alfred. He put an arm around his thin shoulders and drew the ordinarily bright-eyed lad persuasively forward. Alfred Peake, the leader of Pons's little group of Irregulars, was now fourteen; he had grown a scant foot in height since my first meeting with him in the delightful matter of Mr. Sidney Harris's purloined periapt.

"Now, then, Alfred," said Pons, once Alfred was seated—even if only on the edge of a chair—and Pons was leaning against the mantel, his keen eyes searching Alfred's troubled face, "let us begin at the beginning."

"There was this accident, Mr. Pons."

"Where and when?"

"In Commercial Road. Six days ago. His uncle and aunt got killed. Angel—that ain't his name, Mr. Pons, but he looks like one—he came rolling out, he seen us, and he asked us to help him. So we did. Pinky and Sid and me took him before the bobbies got there, and we put him into Fox & Sons' warehouse. We kept him there, brought

him food and drink. Fair cried—he was so glad to be with us! Then tonight, when we got there—a bit late, we were—he was gone. Looked like he fought, too—things all tore up. All we found was a little spill of shag.” He drew a fold of newspaper from his pocket. “Here it is, Mr. Pons.”

Pons took it, opened it carefully, and lifted a pinch of the mixture to his nostrils. “A common tobacco,” he observed. “In ordinary use among labourers everywhere in London.” He laid it carefully aside. “Go on, Alfred. That would have been last Tuesday. At what time of the day?”

“Evening.”

“I see. And the accident?”

“They got out of a cab, Mr. Pons, to cross the street. There was a car waiting there.”

“With a driver?”

“No, sir. It had a licence plate we never saw before, Mr. Pons.”

“Not British?”

“No, sir.”

“Go on.”

“Well, Mr. Pons, they’d just fair got out into the street when a car came down at ’em. Hit ’em both. Angel saw it coming. He threw himself backward, rolled under a car at the kerb, and right up to where we were standing. ‘Quick!’ he says. ‘Help me get away.’ So we took him right off.”

“And the car that struck his uncle and aunt?”

“Got clean away. It never stopped, Mr. Pons.”

Pons’s eyes glittered with interest. “How old would you say the boy is, Alfred?”

“It’s hard to tell, sir. Maybe eight.”

“Now, Alfred, you’ll remember my little lectures on keeping your eyes and ears open. What can you tell me about this boy?”

“Mr. Pons, he wore good clothes. I mean, a lot better than my Dad or Mum could buy. He don’t talk much, but he talks funny.”

“Do you mean he doesn’t speak English well?”

“Oh, Mr. Pons, he talks better English I guess than Pinky or Sid or me. But it sounds queer when he says the words.”

“I see. An accent. Go on.”

“And he won’t say anything about himself.”

“His name?”

“Mr. Pons, Pinky come out and said, ‘He looks like an angel.’ And then we asked him his name and he says, ‘Angel.’ Mr. Pons, he’s been



took. He didn't run off. There was a rough scuffle — things knocked over — his bed all tore apart. . . ."

"Bed?"

Alfred looked sheepish. "We brought him some sheets and blankets and there were a lot of sacks to use under 'em. They were all scattered around. Mr. Pons, help us find him!"

"How many of the boys have seen Angel?" asked Pons.

"Oh, they all saw him."

"Good. Then call the boys together and put them to work. Find out first whether anyone saw the boy brought out from Fox & Sons' warehouse. Learn if you can what conveyances were seen in the vicinity during the day. Discover whether any suspicious characters have been seen in the neighbourhood within the day before his abduction."

Alfred grinned. "Mr. Pons, ever since that accident, the place has been fair crawling with bobbies and Scotland Yard men — I can tell them when they look like Inspector Jamison."

Pons gazed at Alfred for a long, speculative moment, his eyes narrowed. Plainly, that agile brain had seized upon something which escaped my notice.

"So that the boy cannot have been taken far — with such police activity. Spread out and search through Stepney. There are enough crannies in Stepney to conceal a small army. A boy would scarcely be a problem. Be off with you, set the boys to work, and come back here before midnight."

"Thank you, sir. I knew we could count on you."

Alfred left our quarters with alacrity, rattling down the stairs as noisily as he had come up.

Pons bent at once to the newspapers stacked beside his chair, searching out, I guessed, last Wednesday's papers. He went through one after another, in intent silence, until at last an exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

"Here it is, Parker," he said, and read: "'Fatal Accident in Stepney. A middle-aged couple were struck and killed by a speeding car in Commercial Road East late yesterday. The driver of the car involved in the accident failed to stop. The identity of the couple could not be learned. They appeared to be foreigners. A calling card picked up at the scene bore the name, Alexander Obrenović. A police inquiry is under way.'"

That tells us very little."

"Perhaps subsequent reports will say more. Here, Parker," — he





seized several of the week's papers and handed them to me—"go through these, while I search the others."

We set to work with diligence, but at the end of half an hour neither of us could discover another mention of the accident in Stepney.

"Most singular," murmured Pons.

"I'm not surprised," I said. "The press of international events crowds out purely local news."

"Are we then becoming so callous that the snuffing out of two lives is of no more concern than a few casual lines in a single newspaper? I fancy not. No, Parker--there is far more to this than meets the eye."

"Oh, come, Pons! Accidents like this take place every day."

"I am not persuaded that it was an accident," retorted Pons. "Most of the evidence in hand is to the contrary."

I started at him, I fear, in some astonishment, but I waited in vain for any enlightenment.

"I submit this is a matter for my reclusive brother," he went on. "I daresay I can send him a wire that will bring him here before midnight."

"Pons, you're joking."

"I assure you--if ever I was so, I am serious at this moment. There is no time to be lost."

So saying, he scrawled a message on a slip of paper, pushed it into his pocket, and came to his feet. Reaching for his deerstalker and his long grey coat, he said, "I'll take it to Edgware Road myself."

During Pons's absence, I read over several times the brief account in the *Daily Express* which had evidently conveyed to my companion some intelligence I could not discover, and I hunted, again in vain, for further reference to the accident.

When Pons returned and had doffed his outer clothing, he turned again to the little mound of tobacco Alfred Peake had brought him, busying himself briefly with magnifying glass and microscope, which told him little more than he had known before, if his expression could be taken for index to his findings.

"A shag as strong as my own, but of greatly inferior quality," he said. "Quite possibly carried by a seaman or dock-worker--which is the most significant fact to be learned from it."

"I don't follow you in that," I said.

"What is important is that the boy's abductors were not foreigners, like himself. The tobacco was evidently spilled in the scuffle, or else Alfred would not have brought it here. We are thus reasonably

enabled to deduce that his abductors were fellow Englishmen whose instructions were to take him alive and unharmed."

"You are going well beyond the boundaries of ratiocination," I cried.

"Softly, Parker. I submit, in view of the circumstances as we are able to reconstruct them, that the elderly couple were not the prime target of the automobile that killed them, but that it was the death of the boy that was desired. It follows, then, that the abductors of the boy were not the same people who ran down his relatives, for if their goal had been the boy's death, he might as well have been killed at the warehouse!"

"But that is monstrous, Pons!" I cried. "Who would want to kill a little boy?"

"I can think of several people who might like to do so," said Pons enigmatically. He looked at his watch. "My message will be delivered by this time. It is half-past ten. It will take Bancroft less than an hour to get here."

"Pons, perhaps I am especially obtuse this evening, but I fail to understand your conclusions."

"Pray do not apologize. I am accustomed to it," said Pons. "Yet Alfred plainly told us that this was no ordinary accident when he said that the place swarmed with police and Scotland Yard men. Why—if not in search of the boy? The curious absence of any further mention of the accident in the papers suggests interference. I submit that only the strongest representation on the part of the government could have imposed silence upon the London newspapers. Finally, the name on the calling card. It means nothing to you?"

"Except that it is foreign, nothing."

"I am always happy to discover the burgeoning of deductive powers in you, Parker," said Pons dryly. "Obrenović was the family name of the Serbian rulers in the nineteenth century; perhaps its most illustrious representative was Prince Michael III, who was assassinated in 1868."

"As usual, it is simple when you explain it," I admitted.

"Is it not? It should then, also, be obvious to you that the boy is now being held neither by those who have designs on his life nor by those who wish to save him, but by a third party interested solely in selling him to the highest bidder."

"Because he isn't dead?"

"Because, on the one hand, he was not killed on the premises,"

said Pons. "And on the other, he would not have struggled if friends had come to take him. His abductors were Englishmen hired by someone who correctly interpreted the events which took place in Commercial Road East six days ago."

So saying, he lapsed into silence.

Scarcely half an hour had passed when the door to our quarters opened noiselessly and disclosed the impressive figure of Bancroft Pons, his customary sleepy eyes glittering with anticipation, his proud, sensuous lips pressed grimly together. He walked cat-like into the room, but Pons was aware of him without turning.

"So the Foreign Office was sufficiently interested to send you under escort," he said. "You could not have got here so quickly in any other manner."

"Pray spare me these exercises, Solar," said Bancroft Pons. "I was shocked by your wire—deeply shocked. *'Which heir has disappeared?'* How can you possibly know of this matter? We kept the most rigid security."

"Only by the intervention of Providence, my dear fellow," said Pons. "But you have not answered my question."

"Let us say only the successor to one of the Balkan thrones. His disappearance here in London on the eve of the Balkan Conferences is painfully embarrassing to His Majesty's Government."

"To say nothing of the danger the boy now faces," said Pons.

Bancroft Pons sniffed. "I dislike this fencing, Solar. Do you know where he is?"

"Alas, no. Until this evening he was hidden in Fox & Company's warehouse in Stepney. This evening, however, he was abducted, but not by agents associated with the assassins who ran down his uncle and aunt. . . ."

"Cousins," said Bancroft Pons. "The boy was attending a private school, south of London. We have known for some time that anarchistic elements interested in fomenting trouble in the Balkans may have had designs on the boy. His cousins, who were in England to watch over him, removed the boy at the first sign of danger, and arranged to embark at the East India Docks in the hope of taking him to safety on the Continent. It was a convenient fiction for the boy to think of his cousins as uncle and aunt. But you will have surmised as much. Who had the prince?"

"My boys. You have heard me refer to the Praed Street Irregulars."

"What! You anticipated the crime on Commercial Road East?"

"You flatter me. I knew nothing of it until tonight, when Alfred Peake came to announce that the boy had been taken."

"Taken?"

"He was not murdered, which was the goal of his enemies. He struggled with his abductors, which he would not have done if they were friends. So he was seized by some agent independent of the throne and also of his would-be assassins. This was found on the scene."

Pons handed his brother the packet of shag.

Bancroft examined it, held it to his nostrils. "Baggett's," he said.

"Very probably."

"An acrid smell lingers here."

"Gunpowder?"

"I think not. It reminds me of opium."

Pons bounded to his feet and took the shag from Bancroft to hold it again to his own nostrils. He smelled the paper as well.

"No, it is in the tobacco," said Bancroft. "That abominable habit you have of smoking the vile stuff has blunted your olfactory nerve. But enough of this—I grant that a foreigner would not be likely to use Baggett's, but the matter is in any case academic. Who could have the boy? Not Baron Kroll?"

"The Baron is out of the country," said Pons. "Besides, Kroll's interest would have been political; the influence of his government could have been strengthened if the prince were in Germany. No, it is not Kroll."

"Your familiarity in these circles transcends mine," said Bancroft. "Who then?"

"An adventurer not above bargaining with both sides to obtain the highest price for the boy's life," said Pons.

"Name him."

"Very probably Israel Sarpedon. I thought him in Cairo, but evidently he has returned. He is a man utterly devoid of scruples, absolutely without human emotions save only of greed, a man who would sell his mother's life as readily as he would a parcel of shares."

"Where can he be found?"

"He has an establishment in Soho, but the boy will certainly not be there."

"How can you be sure of this, Solar?"

"I cannot," replied Pons. "It is only the strongest probability that Sarpedon has the boy. It is the kind of venture which most appeals to him. If he has him, the boy will be in the hands of Sarpedon's agents,

waiting upon his instructions. He will hardly have been taken far from the scene of his abduction, since the police are nosing about the vicinity of the accident. Moreover, expediency demands that the boy be kept concealed under guard until the hue and cry has died down. Then Sarpedon will make his move."

"He will offer the boy to the highest bidder," said Bancroft with suppressed fury.

"Precisely."

"We can take him."

"Futile," said Pons.

"He and his place can be watched."

"Equally futile. He will never personally show his hand, but will only issue orders through subordinates. There is nothing to be gained by alerting Sarpedon. Do not alarm him, but let us just spread the word that I am looking for him. Your people will know where to drop this information, Bancroft."

"Other than that?"

"Wait on word from me. There are certain matters in which the Foreign Office is without peer — but this is not one of them."

"You have forty-eight hours," said Bancroft, and bade us good-night.

"Such ultimata," observed Pons as he sprang to his feet, "come with remarkable ease to anyone associated with His Majesty's Government."

He vanished into his chamber, from which came the sounds of rummaging about, together with the strains of London street songs hummed somewhat brokenly. Then a suspicious silence followed; this lengthened into a quarter of an hour.

When at last Pons reappeared, he was transformed. If I had not seen him enter his room, I would certainly not have recognized the stooped, ill-kempt beggar who shuffled into the room asking in a whining voice for a halfpenny.

"Good God! Pons — surely you're not going out in that garb!"

"I would scarcely have taken the trouble to assume it purely for your entertainment, Parker," he said crisply. "I'm bound for Stepney and Limehouse. Admirable as the boys are, they may be a little beyond their depth in this matter, considering the brief time we have in which to act. There is a certain Chinese doctor in Limehouse who has a small army of men and women in his employ — his activities, I should add, are even more nefarious than those of Israel Sarpedon — and in this he may be useful to me, as I may someday be to him."



"It surprises me that you have never mentioned Sarpedon to me in all these years," I said.

"He is quite possibly the second most dangerous man in London," said Pons imperturbably.

"Then Baron Kroll is the most dangerous."

Pons smiled. "Yes—but I should add that the Chinese gentleman on whom I am calling tonight takes precedence. He is very probably the most dangerous man in England, if not in Europe. As for Sarpedon," he went on, blunting my astonishment, "I have never had occasion to mention him. For the past eight years he has been in the Middle East, employing his unique talents to the best advantage of his exchequer. He came close to crossing my path once before your time, but we have never actually met. I look forward to that pleasure."

Once more the outer door opened and closed; again there was a rattling on the stairs; and for the second time that night, Alfred Peake burst into our quarters, only to recoil at sight of Pons, his mouth agape. He shot a hasty, alarmed glance at me.

"Where's Mr. Pons, sir?" he asked.

"Alfred, my lad," said Pons. "Have I aged so much since your last visit?"

"Lord love us, Mr. Pons!" cried Alfred, his eyes wide with amazement. "Is it really you?" Then admiration filled his face. "Fooled me, you did, Mr. Pons."

"And the boys?"

"They're out, sir—them who could get out. We'll all be out in the morning."

"Tell me, Alfred," pressed Pons, "do you know a boy of the same age, and the same general size and appearance as Angel?"

Alfred thought deeply. "P'raps David Benjamin would do," he said presently. "He's small for his age."

"Capitall!" said Pons crisply. "I'm coming with you, Alfred. Good-night, Parker."

Alfred ducked back out of the room, Pons at his heels, leaving me smarting a little at Pons's failure to invite me to accompany him, even though I knew that I could never have carried off a disguise as skillfully as he, and might very well only have been in his way.

I was awakened next morning before dawn by Pons's hand on my shoulder.

"Ssst!" he whispered. "We are about to have a visitor."

I slipped out of bed and followed Pons quietly into the living-room, where he stood waiting in the dark.

There was a rustling at the door.

Pons stepped forward and threw it open, revealing a tall, saturnine man of middle age in the act of lighting a cheroot. He favoured Pons with a wintry smile as he slipped into the room with the languid grace of a tiger.

"Mr. Solar Pons, I believe. I understand you were looking for me."

"Mr. Israel Sarpedon," said Pons. "Switch on the light, Parker."

"Though what prevented you from coming to my place in Soho puzzles me," Sarpedon continued, planting himself insolently at one end of the mantel, to face Pons at the other, as I got to the switch.

"Because you don't have in Soho what I want."

"That is?"

"Come, Mr. Sarpedon, let us not fence. I want the boy."

"I don't traffic in children, Mr. Pons."

"Not just any children, Mr. Sarpedon. This one, I think you know, has a certain monetary value over and above that of just any child."

"And supposing I had this boy to whom you refer, do you think you could possibly come up with an offer greater than any other I might obtain?"

"Certainly," said Pons.

"Indeed!"

"Your freedom for his safe delivery. Otherwise, you may find yourself uncomfortably detained for a considerable time. His Majesty's Government looks with singular displeasure on being embarrassed."

"Bluff, Mr. Pons, pure bluff! I could hardly be less disturbed." Calmly, he tossed his cheroot into the fireplace and favoured Pons with a long, calculating stare, with eyes that were as cold as ice. "Tell me, Mr. Pons," he continued, "does it never occur to you that this meddling of yours is likely sometime to lead to consequences of the gravest kind?"

"So is one's most trivial act—like getting out of bed in the morning, or indulging one's curiosity in Praed Street or in Soho—or even, perhaps, in Stepney."

"Let me suggest, Mr. Pons, that interference in affairs which do not concern you may someday be fatal."

"You add zest to my humble existence," said Pons.

"There is something unhealthy about meddlers and meddling," said Sarpedon.

"More so than with those anti-social people who make meddling necessary?" asked Pons.

Sarpedon sniffed disdainfully and strode over to the door. "Good-morning, Mr. Solar Pons. You have been warned."

With this, he went out.

I shot a glance at Pons. He seemed unruffled; indeed, he showed a certain satisfaction. "A dangerous man," I said. "Did you expect him, Pons?"

"I was confident that if word reached him that I was looking for him, his vanity couldn't resist the challenge."

"A daring fellow."

"Not at all. He knows he is on sure ground. When he charged me with bluffing, he knew very well what he was talking about."

"Oh, come Pons!"

"The sinuosities of international diplomacy are sometimes beyond mere mortals like us, but the conclusions to which diplomats come are often only too clearly foreseen. That is why it is essential that the utmost haste be resorted to if Sarpedon is to be thwarted."

He had stepped over to the window as he spoke, and stood peering down intently into the street, now filling with the rising light of dawn. "Ah, he came in his own car. And Alfred has managed to hop on to the back. Capital! Now we shall have to wait to see whether he drives home or whether he stops at the nearest telephone kiosk. I fancy it will be the latter; if so, Alfred may be fortunate enough to discover the number he calls. He'll want to make sure I haven't discovered the place where he is keeping the boy."

He turned away from the windows, rubbing his hands together, his eyes merry. "He may not yet have made his contacts. If not, we have time. If he has, events will move rapidly to culminate to his satisfaction. We shall do our best to prevent it. Now we can only wait."

But waiting sorely tried Solar Pons. When the game was afoot, he was dreadfully restless, and nothing engaged his attention for very long. He spent a little while over a problem in chemistry, and he sawed away at his violin, producing sounds which seemed to me uncommonly execrable—though he called it music, and he spurned the breakfast which Mrs. Johnson brought up and implored him to eat.

When at last the telephone rang, he leapt upon it.

But hope faded to annoyance as he listened.

"That was Alfred," he said, turning away from the instrument. "Sarpedon called a number in Limehouse, but Alfred failed to hear it properly. At least, we can infer that the boy is being held in private quarters somewhere—unless Sarpedon has an outpost at a telephone, which I should think not likely. The fewer men engaged in a venture of this kind the better. He cannot have more than two; there may be only one guarding the boy." He shook his head. "Time speeds past, Parker. We may be too late."

And with this he resumed his restless pacing of our quarters.

I was just passing the telephone close upon the hour of noon when it rang a second time. Even so, Pons reached it before I could take it up. But I was close enough to him to hear the strange, spine-tingling sibilance of the voice that greeted Pons and spoke but a single sentence to him, though I could not hear the words. The effect on Pons, however, was magical; suppressed excitement replaced his tenseness, and he was obviously eager to be off.

"The Doctor has not failed me," he said, putting down the telephone. "The boy is in a house in Salmon Lane. Let me just call Alfred and alert the boys. Then you and I will change our appearance a trifle and go to Limehouse—leaving by the back entrance, since Sarpedon will almost certainly have No. 7B watched—unless you would prefer to spend a more secure sedentary hour or two at home."

"You know better, Pons." I said indignantly. "If I were to stay here, who would be there to look after you?"

It was just past midday when Pons and I, dressed in nondescript clothes, set out by cab for the vicinity of the house in Salmon Lane. Pons sat in silence, chafing visibly at every delay caused by congestion in Oxford Street and High Holborn. In Cheapside we were detained five minutes by a traffic jam, while Pons fairly danced in impotent rage. But at last we turned into White Horse Road and left the cab not far down Salmon Lane to walk along the street, which seemed uncommonly crowded with urchins of all ages.

I saw, too, that there were unusually many foreigners present in the area—Orientals of some kind, some Chinese manifestly, but others who seemed to be Burmese or Malay in origin. I plucked nervously at Pons's sleeve, but he shook me off impatiently.

But I had no time to speak, for suddenly the entire street erupted into activity. Cries of "Fire!" and "Stop, Thief!" went up. Boys, Orientals, and the regular habitués of the street began to run and

mill about. A column of smoke ballooned up from the doorway of a house just a short distance away. Within seconds, Pons and I were rudely jostled and pushed against an adjacent railing, while the crowd of shouting and screaming boys and Orientals pressed all around us.

And did I dream that—just before police whistles began to blow—a tall, stooped Chinese, an ageless old man wearing a skullcap and smoked glasses, drifted past and whispered in a sibilant voice, "Return to Praed Street, Mr. Pons!"? It could hardly have been a hallucination, for Pons gripped my arm hard and at once turned about, starting back the way we had come.

We were hemmed in, however—first by the men and boys running past, then by a crowd of curious people coming into the street from buildings on both sides, finally by a phalanx of policemen—but eventually we made our way back down White Horse Road to Commercial Road, and there, after trying in vain to hail a cab, Pons finally crossed to the Stepney Station of the Midland Railway, where we caught a train for a somewhat roundabout journey back to our quarters, which we reached at last in late afternoon.

Alfred Peake had preceded us. He jumped up as we entered, a little uncertain, but quite sure that he recognized us despite our altered appearance—which had not deceived Pons's Chinese friend.

"He's sleeping, Mr. Pons," he said.

"Capital, Alfred, capital!" cried Pons. "All went well?"

"The moment the smoke bomb went off and they came running out, we went in the back. We had everything ready. David switched clothes with Angel and stayed there. Angel came with us. No danger to David, is there, Mr. Pons?"

"I fancy not."

"All them Chinese—or whatever they were—helped. You got friends, Mr. Pons. They kept those men from coming back—and a lot more."

Pons smiled wryly. "Now then, Alfred—you shall have your reward." He took a handful of pound-notes from the drawer where he carelessly kept coins, and gave them to Alfred. "Distribute them among the Irregulars, with my gratitude, my lad. Without you, I shouldn't have had the pleasure of this little excursion."

When Alfred had gone, Pons said, "Let us get into more presentable clothing, Parker. I daresay it won't be long before we

hear from my estimable brother." He cocked his head to one side. "Is that not Mrs. Johnson's step on the stair?"

"No one could mistake her tread," I said.

Mrs. Johnson knocked gently.

"Come in, come in, Mrs. Johnson," cried Pons.

Our devoted but long-suffering landlady opened the door just enough to stick her head in. "Begging your pardon, Mr. Pons, but a gentleman who said he was your brother telephoned and said you was to do nothing about that matter of the boy until he got here at six o'clock. And will you be wanting supper?"

Pons shot me a triumphant glance. "Thank you, Mrs. Johnson. Yes, supper when you're ready to serve it. And plenty of hot coffee."

At six o'clock promptly, Bancroft Pons walked into our quarters. His face was clouded.

"I fear I bring you bad tidings, Solar," he said.

"Mr. Sarpedon has got through to the Balkan Embassy concerned about the Crown Prince?"

Bancroft grimaced. "You anticipate me. The Embassy wishes us to do nothing."

"Confident that they have bidden more for the boy's life than his would-be assassins. A pity."

"Is it not? But we are helpless in the face of diplomatic pressure."

"All the more pity since it puts us in so delicate a position," Pons went on.

Bancroft Pons's eyes narrowed. "Continue," he said dryly.

"What are we to do with the boy? Or are you suggesting that the Embassy is willing to pay *us*?" Pons's eyes danced mischievously.

"Solar! You cannot mean —! But, of course, you *do* mean it!"

Pons came to his feet, strode to the bedroom door, opened it, and stood aside. "Gently, Bancroft—he sleeps. Let me introduce you to the Crown Prince."

Bancroft looked in and withdrew. Pons closed the door again.

"How on earth did you manage it, Solar?"

"I fear I had to employ agents of whom you would not approve. Necessity, you know—and the urgency of the moment. Can we take Sarpedon?"

Bancroft Pons shook his head. "No scandal. The Embassy would hope to avoid it."

Pons sighed. "I feared as much. Another time, then. He will not forget."

Bancroft settled himself into Pons's favourite chair. 'I'll just wait until he wakes, and restore him to his uneasy throne myself.'

"That may be hours, Bancroft," protested Pons, "and I don't know that I can survive the strain."

"I'll wait," repeated Bancroft. "If we are both silent from time to time, and you can keep away from that infernal violin, we should be able to stand it. Perhaps far easier than that poor lad will find it to face his future!"

Bancroft Pons's words were prophetic. The Crown Prince, safely returned to his parents, lived only to go into exile—but not before Pons had received a handsome gift from the Royal Family.

## *The Adventure of the Penny Magenta*

FROM HIS PLACE at the window one summer morning, Solar Pons said, "Ah, we are about to have a visitor and, I trust, a client. London has been oppressively dull this week, and some diversion is long past due."

I stepped over to his side and looked down.

Our prospective visitor was just in the act of stepping out of his cab. He was a man somewhat past middle age, of medium height, and spare almost to thinness. He affected a greying Vandyke and eyeglasses in old-fashioned square frames. He wore a greening black bowler and a scuffed smoking-jacket, beneath which showed a waistcoat of some flowered material, and he carried a cane, though he did not walk with any pronounced impediment.

"A tradesman," I ventured.

"The keeper of a small shop," said Pons.

"A drapers?"

"You observed his clothing, Parker. His square spectacles and his walking-stick are both old-fashioned. I submit he is in antiques or something of that sort. The nature of his business is such as to permit the casual, since he evidently wears his smoking-jacket at his work."

"Perhaps he came from his home?"

"On the contrary. It is now ten o'clock. Sometime after he arrived at his shop this morning something occurred that has brought him to us."

But our caller was now at the threshold, and in a moment our good landlady, Mrs. Johnson, had ushered him into our quarters. He bowed to her, and, his glance passing over me, he bowed to Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons?"

"I am at your service. Pray sit down."

Our visitor sat down to face Pons, who was now leaning against the mantel, his eyes twinkling with anticipation.

"My name is Athos Humphreys," said our client. "I have a small shop for antiques, old books, and stamps in Hampstead. Other than that I doubt your need to know."



"Save that you are a member of the Masonic order, a bachelor or widower accustomed to living alone, without an assistant at your shop, and with insufficient business to demand your unremitting attendance there," said Pons. "Pray continue, Mr. Humphreys."

Our client betrayed neither astonishment nor displeasure at Pons's little deductions. His glance fell to his Masonic ring, then to the torn and worn cuffs of his smoking-jacket, which no self-respecting woman would have permitted to go unmended, and finally to the lone key depending over the pocket into which he had hastily thrust his key-chain after locking his shop.

"I'm glad to see I've made no mistake in coming to you, Mr. Pons," he continued. "The problem doesn't concern me personally, however, as far as I can determine, but my shop. I must tell you that for the past three mornings I have had indisputable evidence that my shop has been entered. Yet nothing has been taken."

A small sound of satisfaction escaped Pons. "And what was the nature of your evidence that the shop had been entered, if nothing was taken, Mr. Humphreys?" he asked.

"Well, sir, I am a most methodical man. I maintain a certain order in my shop, no matter how careless it looks—that is by design, of course, for an antique shop ought to have an appearance of careful disorder. For the past three mornings I have noticed—sometimes not at once on my arrival—that some object has been moved and put back not quite where it stood before. I have never discovered any way of entry; all else, save for one or two objects, remains as I left it; so I can only suppose that whoever entered my shop did so by means of the door, to which, I ought to say, I have the only key."

"You are fully aware of your inventory, Mr. Humphreys?"

"Positively, sir. I know every item in my shop, and there is nothing there of sufficient value to tempt anyone but a sneak thief content with small reward for his pains."

"Yet it is patent that someone is going to considerable pains to search your shop night after night," said Pons. "A man in your business must lead a relatively sedentary life, Mr. Humphreys. Did you, immediately prior to this sequence of events, do anything at all to attract attention to yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Or your business?"

"No, sir." But here our client hesitated, as if he were about to speak otherwise, yet thought better of it.

"Something caused you to hesitate, Mr. Humphreys. What was it?"

"Nothing of any consequence. It is true that a week ago I was forced to insert a small personal advertisement in the national press asking that relatives of the late Arthur Benefield should come forward and call on me at the shop."

"Who was Arthur Benefield?"

"A patron of mine."

"Surely an unusual patron if you knew neither his address nor his heirs," said Pons. "For if you did, you would hardly have had to extend an invitation to his heirs through the columns of the papers."

"That is correct, Mr. Pons. He left no address. He appeared at my shop for the first time about a month ago, and brought with him a manila envelope filled with loose postage stamps. He had posted the envelope to me – apparently at a branch post-office – but had then immediately retrieved it from the postmaster, evidently someone whose acquaintance he had made – and brought it in person. He appeared to be an American gentleman, and asked me to keep the stamps for him. He paid a 'rental' fee of five pounds for that service during the month following his visit. He also bought several stamps from my collection and added them to his own."

"Mr. Benefield was run down and killed in a motor accident ten days ago. I saw his picture in one of the papers, together with a request for relatives to come forward. Let me hasten to assure you, Mr. Pons, if you are thinking that the entry to my shop has anything to do with Mr. Benefield, I'm afraid you're very much mistaken. I took the liberty of examining the contents of Mr. Benefield's envelope as soon as I learned of his death. It contains no stamp worth more than a few shillings. Indeed, I doubt very much if the entire lot of mixed stamps would command more than ten pounds."

Pons stood for a moment in an attitude of deep thought. Then he said, "I fancy a look at the premises would not be amiss. Are you prepared to take us to your shop, Mr. Humphreys?"

"I would be honoured to do so, Mr. Pons. I have a cab waiting below, if you care to return with me."

Our client's was indeed a little shop. It was one of those charming, old-fashioned places not uncommon in London and its environs, standing as if untouched by time from 1780 onward. A

pleasant, tinkling bell announced our entrance, Mr. Humphreys having thrown the door wide and stood aside to permit us to pass. Then he in turn passed us, hanging his bowler on a little rack not far from the door, and throwing his keys carelessly on to his counter. His shop was crowded, and wore just that air of planned carelessness which would intrigue the searcher after curios or unusual pieces for the household. Shelves, floor, tables—all were filled with bric-a-brac, knick-knacks, and period pieces. One wall was given over to books of all kinds, neatly arranged on shelves which reached from floor to ceiling. At the far end of the shop—next to a curtained-off alcove which was evidently a small place in which our client could brew himself tea, if he liked, for the sound of a boiling kettle soon came from it—stood Mr. Humphreys's desk, a secretaire of Chippendale design.

Our client was eager to show us how he had discovered that his shop had been entered in the night. He went directly to a Chinese vase which stood on top of a lacquered box on a table not far from the counter.

"If you will look carefully, Mr. Pons, you will see that the position of this vase varies by a quarter of an inch from the faint circle of lint and dust which indicates where it stood before it was moved. I have not had occasion to move this piece for at least a week. Of itself, it has no value, being an imitation Han Dynasty piece. Nor has the lacquer box on which it stands. The box, I have reason to believe, has been opened. Of course, it is empty."

Pons, however, was not particularly interested in our client's demonstration. "And where do you keep Mr. Benefield's stamps?" he asked.

Our client went around his counter and placed his right hand on a letter-rack which stood on his desk. "Here, Mr. Pons."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pons, with an ill-concealed smile twitching his lips, "is that not an unorthodox place for it?"

"It was where Mr. Benefield asked me to keep it. Indeed, he enjoined me to keep it here, in this envelope, in this place."

"So that anyone whose eye chanced to fall upon it would think it part of your correspondence, Mr. Humphreys?"

"I had not thought of it so, but I suppose it would be true," said Humphreys thoughtfully.

"Let us just have a look at Mr. Benefield's collection of stamps."

"Very well, Mr. Pons. It can do no harm, now the poor fellow is dead."

He handed the manila envelope to Pons. It was not a large envelope—perhaps four and a half inches by six and a half or thereabouts, but it bulged with its contents, and it had been stamped heavily with British commemorative issues of larger than common size. It had been addressed to Mr. Humphreys, and the stamps on its face had been duly canceled; manifestly, if Mr. Humphreys's story were true, Mr. Benefield had had to apply to someone in the Post Office for its return to his hand, so that he could bring it in person to our client's shop. Pons studied the envelope thoughtfully.

"It did not seem to you strange that Mr. Benefield should make such a request of you, Mr. Humphreys?"

"Mr. Pons, I am accustomed to dealing with all manner of strange people. I suppose the collector is always rather more extraordinary in his habits and conduct than ordinary people."

"Perhaps that is true," pursued Pons. "Still, the circumstances of your possession of this envelope suggest that it contains something of value—of such value, indeed, that its owner was extremely reluctant to let it out of his sight long enough for the postman to deliver it, and left it here only because of dire necessity."

"But if that were true," objected our client reasonably, "what had he to gain by leaving it here?"

"In such plain sight, too, Mr. Humphreys," said Pons, chuckling. "I submit he had to gain what he most wanted—effective concealment. There is a story by the American, Poe, which suggests the gambit—a letter hidden in a torn envelope on a rack in sight of anyone who might walk into the room. What better place of concealment for an object—let us say, a stamp—than in the letter-rack of a man who carries on a small philatelic business?"

"Mr. Pons, your theory is sound, but in fact it doesn't apply. I have gone over the stamps in that envelope with the greatest care. I assure you, on my word as a modest authority in philately, that there is not a stamp in that collection worth a second glance from a serious collector of any standing. There is most certainly nothing there to tempt a thief to make such elaborate forays into my humble establishment."

"I believe you, Mr. Humphreys," said Pons, still smiling. "Yet I put it to you that this is the object of your malefactor's search."

"Mr. Pons, I would willingly surrender it to him—if he could prove he had a right to it, of course."

"Let us not be hasty," said Pons dryly.

So saying, he calmly opened the envelope and unceremoniously emptied its contents on to the counter before us. Then, much to our client's amazement, he bestowed not a glance at the stamps but gave his attention again to the envelope, which he now took over to the window and held up against the sunlight. The manila, however, was too thick to permit him any vision through it.

"It would seem to be an ordinary envelope," he said. "And these stamps which were to have paid its way here?"

"Just ordinary postage stamps, Mr. Pons."

Pons lowered the envelope and turned to look toward the curtained alcove. "Is that not a kettle, Mr. Humphreys?"

"Yes, sir. I keep hot water always ready for tea."

"Let us just repair to that room, if you please."

"It is hardly large enough for us all."

"Very well, then. I will take the liberty of using it, and you and Parker may guard the door."

Our client flashed a puzzled glance at me, but I could not relieve his dubiety nor inform him of Pons's purpose. That, however, was soon clear, for Pons went directly to the kettle on Mr. Humphreys's gas-ring, and proceeded without a qualm to hold the stamped corner of the envelope over the steam.

"What are you doing, Mr. Pons?" cried our client in alarm.

"I trust I am about to find the solution to the initial part of our little problem, Mr. Humphreys," said Pons.

Our client suppressed the indignation he must have felt, and watched in fascinated interest as Pons finally peeled back the stamps.

"Aha!" exclaimed Pons, "what have we here?"

Beneath the stamps lay revealed, carefully protected by a thin square of cellophane, a shabby-looking stamp of a faded magenta colour. Indeed, it was such a stamp that, were I a philatelist, I would have cast aside, for not only was it crudely printed but it had also been clipped at the corners. Pons, however, handled it with the greatest care.

"I daresay this is the object of the search which has been conducted of your premises, Mr. Humphreys," said Pons. "Unless I am very much mistaken, this is the famous one-penny magenta rarity, printed in British Guiana in 1856, discovered by a boy of fifteen here in our country, and originally sold for six shillings. After being in the collection of Philippe Ferrari for many years, it was sold to a

rich American at auction for the fabulous price of £7,500. Correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Humphreys."

Our client, who had been staring at the stamp in awe and fascination, found his voice. "You have made no error of fact, Mr. Pons, but one of assumption. There is only one penny magenta known to exist, despite the most intensive search for others. That stamp is still in the collection of the widow of the American millionaire who bought it at the Ferrari auction in 1925. This one can be only a forgery—a very clever, most deceptive counterfeit—but still, Mr. Pons, a forgery, with only the value of a curiosity. The original would now be worth close to ten thousand pounds; but this copy is scarcely worth the labour and care it took to make it."

Pons carefully replaced the stamps on the envelope, keeping the penny magenta to one side. Then he returned to the counter and put the loose stamps back into the envelope.

"If you have another, larger envelope, Mr. Humphreys, put this into it, and label it 'Property of Arthur Benefield,'" instructed Pons. "I am somewhat curious now to know more of your late customer. Was he a young man?"

"Mr. Pons, I can only show you the cutting from the *Daily Telegraph*. It conveys all I can tell you," replied Humphreys.

He went back to his desk, opened a drawer, and took out the account.

Pons bent to it, and I looked over his shoulder.

The photograph was that of a young man, certainly not over thirty-five. He was not ill-favoured in looks, and affected a small moustache. He appeared to be of medium build. The story beneath it indicated that the photograph had been found in his wallet, but that no address had been discovered. From the presence of American currency on him, the authorities had concluded that Benefield was an American tourist in London. They had had no response to official inquiries at the usual sources, however.

Benefield had been found in the street one night. Evidence indicated that he had been struck and killed by a fast-traveling car; police were looking for one which must have been severely damaged by the force of the impact. Car and driver had vanished, as was to be expected.

Pons read this in silence and handed it back to our client.

"Our next step," he said, "will be to catch the intruder. I have no question but that he will return tonight."

Athos Humphreys paled a little. "I should say, Mr. Pons, I am not a wealthy man. I had not inquired about your fee. . . ."

"Say no more, Mr. Humphreys," replied Pons with animation. "If you will permit me to retain this little stamp for its curiosity value, I shall feel amply repaid."

"By all means, Mr. Pons."

"Very well, then. Parker and I will return here late this afternoon prepared to spend the night in your shop, if that is agreeable to you."

"It is indeed, sir."

We bade our client farewell and repaired to our lodgings.

We returned to Athos Humphreys's antique shop just before his closing hour that evening. It was not without some patent misgivings that our client locked us into his premises and departed. Clearly he was doubtful of our success and perhaps concerned lest our venture result in a scuffle in the narrow confines of his premises, and concomitant damage to his stock.

Pons had insisted that both of us be armed. In addition, he carried a powerful electric torch. So protected, we took up a cramped position concealed behind the curtain in the little alcove leading off the shop. Once we were alone, Pons warned again that our quarry was likely to be more desperate than I had imagined, and adjured me to keep my eyes on the door of the shop.

"You are so positive he'll come by the door," I said. "Suppose he opens a window and drops in from behind?"

"No, Parker, he will not. He has a key," replied Pons. "Surely you observed how careless Humphreys was with his keys when he came in with us this morning! He simply threw them on the counter and left them in plain sight. Anyone prepared to do so could have made wax impressions of the lot. I have no doubt that is what took place, as soon as our client's advertisement appeared and apprised our quarry that Humphreys undoubtedly possessed something belonging to Benefield, and what, more likely, than the very object of his search? I see him as a patient and dangerous man, unwilling to be caught, but determined to have what he is after."

"The penny magenta? But why would anyone take the trouble to conceal a forgery so carefully?"

"Why, indeed!" answered Pons enigmatically. "It suggests nothing to you?"

"Only that the man who wants it is deceived as to its actual value."

"Nothing other?"

"I can think of nothing."

"Very well, then. Let us just look at the problem anew. Mr. Athos Humphreys, a comparatively obscure dealer in antiques, is sought out by an American as a repository for a packet of stamps, all of no great value. Mr. Benefield has gone to the trouble of achieving a cancellation of his stamps, and then to the even greater trouble of recovering the packet to bring it in person—a considerable achievement, considering the rigidity of the Post Office system. He pays at least half what his packet of stamps is manifestly worth to make sure that Humphreys keeps it where he directs. And where does he direct that it be kept? In plain sight in Humphreys's own letter-rack, after Benefield has made certain that it bears every appearance of having been posted to Humphreys. Does all this still suggest nothing further to you, Parker?"

"Only that Benefield seemed certain someone wanted the packet."

"Capital! You are making progress."

"So he made sure it wouldn't attract attention, and, if seen, would be mistaken for other than what it was. The envelope bore no return address, and the name of Humphreys was hurriedly printed in block capitals. That, I presume, was so the man who wanted it wouldn't recognize Benefield's handwriting, which very probably he knew."

"It gives me pleasure to discover how handsomely your capacity for observation has grown, Parker. But—no more?"

"I fear I have shot my bolt, Pons."

"Well, then, let us just say a few words about Mr. Benefield. It does not seem to you strange that he should have so conveniently met with a fatal accident after reaching London?"

"Accidents happen every day. It is a well-known fact that the accident toll exceeds the mortality rate in wartime."

"I submit that the late Benefield and his pursuer were in this matter together. I put it to you further that Benefield slipped away from his partner in the venture and came to London by himself to offer the penny magenta for sale without the necessity of dividing the spoils with his partner, who followed and found him but has not yet found the stamp. It is not too much to conclude that it was his



hand at the wheel of the car that caused Benefield's death."

"Ingenious," I said dubiously.

"Elementary, my dear Parker," said Pons.

"Except for the fact that the penny magenta is a forgery," I finished.

"Ah, Parker, you put my poor powers to shame," he answered with a dry chuckle. "But now I think we had better keep quiet. I should tell you I have notified Inspector Taylor, who will be within earshot waiting upon our signal."

I had begun to drowse, when Pons's light touch on my arm woke me. The hour was close to midnight, and the sound of a key in the lock came distinctly to ear. In a moment the outer door opened, and, from my position behind the curtain, I saw a dark figure slip into the shop. In but a moment more, the shade of a dark-lantern was drawn cautiously a little to one side. Its light fell squarely upon the counter and there, framed in it, was the envelope on which our client had written Arthur Benefield's name.

The light held to the counter.

Then, in four rapid and silent strides, the intruder was at the counter. I saw his hand reach down and take up the envelope.

At that moment Pons turned on his electric torch and silhouetted a well-dressed, thin-faced young man whose startled glance gave him a distinctly fox-like look. He stood for but a split second in the light; then he dropped, spun around, and leaped for the door.

Pons was too quick for him. He caught up a heavy iron ornament and threw it with all his force. It struck our quarry cruelly on the side of one knee; he went down and stayed down.

"Keep your hands out of your pockets; we are armed," said Pons, advancing toward him. "Parker, just open the door and fire a shot into the air. That will bring Taylor."

Our quarry sat up, one hand gripping his knee painfully, the other still clinging to the envelope of stamps. "The most you can charge me with," he said in a cultured voice, "is breaking and entering. Perhaps theft. This is as much my property as it was Arthur's."

"I fancy the charge will be murder," said Pons, as Inspector Taylor's pounding footsteps waxed in the night.

Back in our quarters at 7B Praed Street, Pons lingered over a pipe of shag. I, too, hesitated to go to bed.

"You do not seem one whit puzzled over this matter, Pons," I said at last. "Yet I confess that its entire motivation seems far too slight to justify its events."

"You are certainly right, Parker," he answered with maddening gravity. "It does not then suggest anything further to you?"

"No, I am clear as to the picture."

"But not as to its interpretation, eh?"

"No."

"I submit there is a basic error in your reasoning, Parker. It has occurred to you to realize that one would hardly go to such lengths, even to commit murder, for a counterfeit stamp worth five pounds at best. Yet it does not seem to have occurred to you that the penny magenta I have here as a gift from our client may indeed be worth, as he estimated, ten thousand pounds?"

"We know that the single copy of that stamp exists in an American collection."

"Say, rather, we believe it does. I submit that *this* is the only genuine British Guiana penny magenta rarity, and that the copy in the American collection is a counterfeit. I took the liberty of sending a cable this afternoon, and I fancy we shall have a visitor from America just as fast as an aeroplane will make it possible from New York to Croydon."

Pons was not in error.

Three days later, a representative of the American collector presented himself at our quarters and paid Pons a handsome reward for the recovery of the penny magenta. Both Benefield and his partner, who had been identified as a man named Watt Clark, had been in the collector's service. They had forged the false penny magenta and exchanged it for the genuine stamp, after which they had left their positions. The substitution had not been noticed until Pons's cable sent the collector to the experts, whose verification of Pons's suspicion had resulted in the dispatching of the collector's representative to bear the fabulously valuable penny magenta home in person.

## *The Adventure of the Remarkable Worm*

"AH. PARKER!" exclaimed Solar Pons, as I walked into our quarters at 7B Praed Street late one mid-summer afternoon in the years of the century's third decade, "you may be just in time for another of those little forays into the criminological life of London in which you take such incomprehensible delight."

"You have taken a case," I said.

"Say, rather, I have consented to an appeal."

As he spoke, Pons laid aside the pistol with which he had been practising, an abominable exercise which understandably disturbed our long-suffering landlady, Mrs. Johnson. He reached among the papers on the table and tossed over a card so that it fell before me on the table's edge, the message up.

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"Mr. Humphreys always said you were better than the police, so if it is all right I will come there late this afternoon when Julia comes and tell you about it. The doctor says it is all right with Mr. P., but I wonder.

"Yours resp.,

"MRS. FLORA WHITE."

Pons regarded me with a glint in his eye as I read it.

"A cryptogram?" I ventured.

Pons chuckled. "Oh, come, Parker, it is not as difficult as all that. She is only agitated and perhaps indignant."

"I confess this is anything but clear to me."

"I do not doubt it," said Pons dryly. "But it is really quite simple on reflection. She makes reference to a Mr. Humphreys; I submit it is that fellow Athos Humphreys for whom we did a bit of investigation in connection with that little matter of the Penny Magenta. She wishes to consult us about a matter in which a doctor has already been called. The doctor has not succeeded in reassuring her or allaying her alarm. She cannot come at once because she cannot leave her patient alone. The patient, therefore, is at least not dead.

She must wait until Julia comes, which will be late this afternoon; it is not amiss, therefore, to venture that Julia is her daughter or at least a schoolgirl, who must wait upon dismissal of classes before she can take Mrs. White's place and thus free our prospective client to see us.

"Since it is now high time for her to make an appearance, she has probably arrived in that cab which has just come to a stop outside."

I stepped to the window and looked down. A cab was indeed standing before our lodgings, and a heavy woman of middle age was ascending the steps of Number 7. She was dressed in very plain clothing, which suggested that she had come directly away from her work. Her only covering, apart from an absurdly small feathered hat, was a thin shawl, for the day was cool for August.

In a few moments Mrs. Johnson had shown her in, and she stood looking from one to the other of us, her florid face showing but a moment's indecision before she smiled uncertainly at my companion.

"You're Mr. Pons, ain't yer?"

"At your service, Mrs. White," replied Pons with unaccustomed graciousness, as his alert eyes took in every detail of her appearance. "Pray sit down and tell us about the little problem which vexes you."

She sat down with growing confidence, drew her shawl a little away from her neck, and began to recount the circumstances which had brought her to our quarters. She spoke in an animated voice, in a dialect which suggested not so much Cockney as transplanted provincial.

She explained how she "says to Mr. 'Umphreys," and he "says to me to ask his friend, Solar Pons; so I done like he said," as soon as her niece came from school. Pons sat patiently through her introduction until his patience was rewarded. He did not interrupt her story, once she began it.

She was employed as a cleaning woman at several houses. This was her day at the home of Idomeno Persano, a solitary resident of Hampstead Heath, an expatriate American of Spanish parentage. He had bought a house on the edge of the Heath eleven years before, and since that time had led a most sedentary life. He was known to frequent the Heath in the pursuit of certain entomological interests. As a collector of insects and information pertinent thereto, he was attentive to the children of the

neighbourhood; they knew him as a benign old fellow, who was ever ready to give them sixpence or a shilling for some insect to add to his collection.

Persano's life appeared to be in all respects retiring. Judging by what Mrs. White told in her rambling manner, he corresponded with fellow entomologists and was in the habit of sending and receiving specimens. He had always seemed to be a very easy-going man, but one day a month ago, he had received a post-card from America which had upset him very much. It had no writing on it but his name and address, and it was nothing but a comic picture-card. Yet he had been very agitated at receipt of it, and since that time he had not ventured out of the house.

Mrs. White had been delayed in coming to her employer's home on this day; so it was not until afternoon that she reached the house. She was horrified to find her employer seated at his desk in an amazing condition. She thought he had gone stark mad. She had striven to arouse him, but all she could draw from him was a muttered few words which sounded like "the worm—unknown to science." And something about "the dog"—but there had never been a dog in the house, and there was not now. Nothing more. He was staring at a specimen he had apparently just received in the post. It was a worm in a common matchbox.

"Och, an 'orrible worm, Mr. Pons. Fair give me the creeps, it did!" she said firmly.

She had summoned a physician at once. He was a young *locum tenens*, and confessed himself completely at sea when confronted with the ailing Persano. He had never encountered an illness of quite such a nature before, but he discovered a certain paralysis of the muscles and came to the conclusion that Persano had had a severe heart attack. From Mrs. White's description, the diagnosis suggested coronary trouble. He had administered a sedative and had recommended that the patient be not moved.

Mrs. White, however, was not satisfied. As soon as the doctor had gone, she had consulted "Mr. 'Umphreys," with the result that she had sent the note I had seen by messenger. Now she was here. Would Mr. Pons come around and look at her employer?

I could not refrain from asking, "Why did you think the doctor was wrong, Mrs. White?"

"I feels it," she answered earnestly. "It's intuition, that's what, sir. A woman's intuition."

"Quite right, Mrs. White," said Pons in a tolerant voice which irritated me the more. "My good friend Parker is of that opinion so commonly held by medical men, that his fellow practitioners are somehow above criticism or question by lay persons. I will look at Mr. Persano, though my knowledge of medicine is sadly limited."

"And 'ere," said our client, "is the card 'e got."

So saying, she handed Pons a coloured post-card of a type very common in America, a type evidently designed for people on holiday wishing to torment their friends who are unable to take time off. It depicted in cartoon form a very fat man running from a little dog which had broken his leash. The drawing was bad, and the lettered legend was typical: "Having a fast time at Fox Lake. Wish you were here." The obverse bore nothing but Persano's address and a Chicago postmark.

"That is surely as innocuous a communication as I have ever seen," I said.

"Is it not, indeed?" said Pons, one eyebrow lifted.

"I could well imagine that it would irritate Persano."

"'Upset' was the word, I believe, Mrs. White?"

"That he was, Mr. Pons. Fearful upset. I seen 'im, seein' as how 't was me 'anded it to 'im. I says to 'im, 'Yer friends is havin' a time on their 'oliday,' I says. When 'e seen it, 'e went all white, and was took with a coughin' spell. 'E threw it from him without a word. I picked it up and kept it; so 'ere 'tis."

Pons caressed the lobe of his right ear while he contemplated our client. "Mr. Persano is a fat man, Mrs. White?"

Her simple face lit up with pleasure. "That 'e is, Mr. Pons, though 'ow yer could know it, I don't see. Mr. 'Umphreys was right. A marvel 'e said yer was."

"And how old would you say he is?"

"Oh, in 'is sixties."

"When you speak of your employer as having been 'upset,' do you suggest that he was frightened?"

Our client furrowed her brows. "'E was upset," she repeated doggedly.

"Not angry?"

"No, sir. Upset. Troubled, like. 'Is face changed colour; 'e said something under 'is breath I didn't 'ear; 'e threw the card away, like as if 'e didn't want ter see it again. I picked it up and kep' it."

Pons sat for a moment with his eyes closed. Then he took out his

watch and consulted it. "It is now almost six o'clock. The matter would seem to me of some urgency. You've kept your cab waiting?"

Mrs. White nodded. "Julia will be that anxious."

"Good!" cried Pons, springing to his feet. "We will go straight back with you. There is not a moment to be lost. We may already be too late."

He doffed his worn purple dressing-gown, flung it carelessly aside, and took up his Inverness and deerstalker.

Throughout the drive to the scene of our client's experience, Pons maintained a meditative silence, his head sunk on his chest, his lean fingers tented where his hands rested below his chin.

The house on the edge of Hampstead Heath was well isolated from its neighbours. A substantial hedge, alternating with a stone wall, ran all around the building, which was of two storeys, and not large. Our client bustled from the cab, Pons at her heels, leaving me to pay the fare. She led the way into the house, where we were met by a pale-faced girl who was obviously relieved to see someone.

"Been any change, Julia?" asked Mrs. White.

"No, 'm. He's sleeping."

"Anybody call?"

"No 'm. No one."

"That's good. Yer can go 'ome now, that's a good girl." Turning to us; our client pointed to a door to her left, "In there, Mr. Pons."

The light of two old-fashioned lamps revealed the scene in all its starkness. Mrs. White's employer sat in an old Chippendale wing chair before a broad table, no less old-style than the lamps which shed an eerie illumination in the room. He was a corpulent man, but it was evident at a glance that he was not sleeping, for his eyes were open and staring toward the curious object which lay before him—an opened matchbox with its contents, which looked to my untutored eye very much like a rather fatter-than-usual caterpillar. A horrible smile—the *risus sardonicus*—twisted Persano's lips.

"I fancy Mr. Persano is in your department, Parker," said Pons quietly.

It took but a moment to assure me of what Pons suspected. "Pons, this man is dead!" I cried.

"It was only an off-chance that we might find him alive," observed Pons. He turned to our client and added, "I'm afraid you must now notify the police, Mrs. White. Ask for Inspector Taylor at Scotland Yard. Say to him that I am here."







Mrs. White, who had given forth but one wail of distress at learning of her employer's death, rallied sufficiently to say that there was no telephone in the house. She would have to go to a neighbour's.

The moment our client had gone, Pons threw himself into a fever of activity. He took up one of the lamps and began to examine the room, dropping to his knees now and then, scrutinizing the walls, the bookshelves, the secretaire against one wall, and finally the dead man himself, examining Persano's hands and face with what I thought to be absurd care.

"Is there not a peculiar colour to the skin, Parker?" he asked at last.

I admitted that there was.

"Is it consistent with coronary thrombosis?"

"It isn't usual."

"You saw that faint discoloration of one finger," continued Pons. "There is some swelling, is there not?"

"And a slight flesh wound. Yes, I saw it."

"There is some swelling and discoloration of exposed portions of the body surely," he went on.

"Let me anticipate you, Pons," I put in. "If the man has been poisoned, I can think of no ordinary poison which would be consistent with the symptoms. Arsenic, antimony, strychnine, prussic acid, cyanide, atropine—all are ruled out. I am not prepared to say that this man died of unnatural causes."

"Spoken with commendable caution," observed Pons dryly. "I submit, however, that the evident symptoms are inconsistent with coronary thrombosis."

"They would seem so."

With this Pons appeared to be satisfied. He gave his attention next to the table before which Persano's body sat. The surface of the table was covered with various objects which suggested that Persano had been in the process of trying to identify the remarkable worm when he was stricken. Books on entomology and guides to insect-life lay open in a semi-circle around the opened matchbox with its strange occupant; beyond, in the shadow away from the pool of light from the lamp on the table, lay a case of mounted insects in various stages of their evolution from the larval through the pupal. This, too, suggested that Persano was searching for some points of similarity between them and the specimen unknown to science.

I reached out to take up the matchbox, but Pons caught my arm.

"No, Parker. Let us not disturb the scene. Pray observe the discarded cover of the box. Are there not pin-pricks in it?"

"The creature would need air."

Pons chuckled. "Thank heaven for the little rays of humour which your good nature affords us!" he exclaimed. "The worm is dead; I doubt that it ever was alive. Besides, the parcel was wrapped. Let us just turn the cover over."

He suited his actions to his words. It was at once evident that the pin-pricks spelled out a sentence. Together with Pons, I leaned over to decipher it.

"Little dog catches big cat."

I flashed a glance at Pons. "If that's a message, certainly it is in code."

"Surely a limited message, if so," demurred Pons.

"But it's nothing more than child's play," I protested. "It can have no meaning."

"Little, indeed," agreed Pons. "Yet I fancy it may help to establish the identity of the gentleman who brought about Idomeno Persano's death."

"Oh, come, Pons, you are joking!"

"No, no, the matter is almost disappointingly elementary," retorted Pons. "You know my methods, Parker; you have all the facts. You need only apply them."

With this he came to his knees at the wastepaper-basket, where he sought diligently until he found a box six inches square, together with cord and wrapping-paper.

"This would appear to be the container in which the worm arrived," he said, examining the box. "Well filled with packing, so that the specimen should not be jolted, I see. Does that convey nothing to you, Parker?"

"It is the customary way of sending such specimens."

"Indeed." He looked at the wrapping. "The return address is plainly given. 'Fowler. 29 Upper Brook Street.' Yet it was posted in Wapping, a little detail I daresay Persano overlooked. Some care for details is indicated. Fowler will doubtless turn out to be a known correspondent in matters entomological, but most definitely not the source of this remarkable worm."

At this moment Mrs. White returned, somewhat out of breath. At her heels followed the young *locum tenens* she had evidently gone to fetch after telephoning Scotland Yard; and, bringing up the rear, came Inspector Walter Taylor, a feral-faced young man in

his thirties who had more than once shown an unusual aptitude for the solution of crime within his jurisdiction.

With his arrival, the Inspector immediately took charge, and soon Pons and I were on our way back to 7B Praed Street, Pons bearing with almost gingerly care, with Inspector Taylor's permission, a little parcel containing the extraordinary worm which had sent Idomeno Persano to madness and death.

In our quarters once more, Pons carefully uncovered the worm and placed it, still in its matchbox, under the light on his desk. Thus seen, it was truly an imposing sight. It was furred, like a caterpillar, but also horned, like some pupal stages, with not one horn, but four, one pair rising from the back close to its head, the other facing the first pair, but rising from the other end of the worm. Its head was bare of fur and featured a long proboscis, from which uncoiled a slender, thread-like tongue. It appeared to have no less than four rows of feet, double rows extending all the way along its length, as multitudinous as those of a centipede, and very similar in construction. Double antennae rose from the back of its head, reaching to the height of the horns, while its tail was thick and blunt. It was perhaps four inches in length, and at least two inches in diameter.

"Have you ever seen its like before?" asked Pons delightedly, his eyes twinkling.

"Never. How could I, if even science does not know it?"

"Ah, Parker, do not be so ready to take someone's word for such a judgment. There is no such thing, technically, as a worm unknown to science. Any worm discovered by a scientist can be readily enough classified, even if not immediately identified with precision."

"On the contrary," I retorted with some spirit. "It lies before us."

"Let me put it this way, Parker—if the worm is unknown to science, there is no such worm."

"I'm afraid we are reversing roles, Pons," I said with asperity. "Is it not you who scores off me constantly for my didacticism?"

"I am guilty of the charge," he admitted. "But in this case, I must give you no quarter. This worm is unknown to science for precisely the reason I have stated—there is no such worm."

"But it lies here, refuting you!"

"Pray look again, my dear fellow. I submit that the head of this interesting creature is nothing less than the head of a sphinx moth—commonly known also as a hawk moth or humming-bird

moth—quite possibly the common striped sphinx, *Deilephila lineata*. The elaborate legs are nothing more than complete centipedes cunningly fitted in—six of them, I should say; these appear to be a centipede commonly found in the northern part of North America, *Scutigera forceps*. The antennae apparently derive from two sources—the furred pair suggest the *Actias luna*, or common Luna moth; the long, thin green pair are surely those of *Pterophylla camellifolia*, the true katydid. The fur is as equally a fabrication, and the horns—ah, Parker, the horns are little masterpieces of deception! This is a remarkable worm indeed. How closely did you examine the wound in Persano's finger?"

"I examined it with my customary care," I answered somewhat stiffly.

"What would you say had caused it?"

"It appeared to be a gash, as if he had run his finger into a nail or a splinter, though the gash was clean."

"So that you could, if pressed, suggest that Persano had come to his death by venom administered through a snake's fang?"

"Since my imagination is somewhat more restricted, of scientific necessity, than yours, Pons . . .," I began, but he interrupted me.

"Like this," said Pons.

He seized hold of a pair of tweezers and caught the remarkable worm of Idomeno Persano between them. Instantly the four horns on the creature's thick body shot forth fangs; from two of them a thin brown fluid still trickled.

"Only one of these found its mark," said Pons dryly. "It seems to have been enough." He gazed at me with twinkling eyes and added, "I believe you had the commendable foresight not to include snake venom in that list of poisons you were confident had not brought about Persano's death."

For a moment I was too nonplussed to reply. "But this is the merest guesswork," I protested finally.

"You yourself eliminated virtually all other possibilities," countered Pons. "You have left me scarcely any other choice."

"But what of the dog?" I cried.

"What dog?" asked Pons with an amazement he did not conceal.

"If I recall rightly, Mrs. White said that Persano spoke of a dog. A dog's tooth might well have made that gash."

"Ah, Parker, you are straying afield," said Pons with that air of patient tolerance I always found so trying. "There was no such dog. Mrs. White herself said so."

"You suggest, then, that Mrs. White misunderstood her employer's dying words?"

"Not at all. I daresay she understood him correctly."

"I see. Persano spoke of a dog, but there was no dog," I said with a bitterness which did not escape Pons.

"Come, come, Parker!" replied Pons, smiling. "One would not expect you to be a master of my profession any more than one could look to me as a master of yours. Let us just see how skillfully this is made."

As he spoke, he proceeded with the utmost care to cut away the fur and the material beneath. He was cautious not to release the spring again, and presently revealed a most intricate and wonderfully wrought mechanism, which sprang the trap and forced the venom from small rubber sacs attached to the fangs by tubes.

"Are those not unusually small fangs?" I asked.

"If I were to venture a guess, I should say they belonged to the coral or harlequin snake, *Micrurus fulvius*, common to the southern United States and the Mississippi Valley. Its poison is a neurotoxin; it may have been utilized, but certainly not in its pure state. It was most probably adulterated with some form of alkaloid poison to prolong Persano's death and complicate any medical treatment Persano may have sought. The snake belongs to the Proteroglyphs, or front-fanged type of which cobras and mambas are most common in their latitudes. The 'worm' was designed to spring the fangs when touched; it was accordingly well packed so that its venom would not be discharged by rough handling in transit." He cocked an eye at me. "Does this deduction meet with your approval, Parker?"

"It is very largely hypothetical."

"Let us grant that it is improbable, if no more so than the worm itself. Is it within the bounds of possibility?"

"I would not say it was not."

"Capital! We make progress."

"But I should regard it as a highly dubious method of committing murder."

"Beyond doubt. Had it failed, its author would have tried again. He meant to kill Persano. He succeeded. If he tried previously to do so, we have no record of it. Persano was a secretive man, but he had anticipated that an attempt would be made. He had had what was certainly a warning."

"The post-card?"

Pons nodded. "Let us compare the writing on the card with that on the wrapping of the packet."

It required little more than a glance to reveal that the script on the wrapping of the package which had contained the lethal worm was entirely different from that on the post-card. But if Pons was disappointed, he did not show it; his eyes were fairly dancing with delight, and the hint of a smile touched his thin lips.

"We shall just leave this for Inspector Taylor to see. Meanwhile, the hour is not yet nine; I shall be able to reach certain sources of information without delay. If Taylor should precede my return, pray detain him until I come."

With an annoyingly enigmatic smile, Pons took his leave.

It was close to midnight when my companion returned to our quarters. Fog pressed whitely against the windows of 7B, and the familiar sounds from outside—the chimes of the clock a few streets away, the rattle of passing traffic, the occasional rumble of a lorry—had all but died away.

Inspector Taylor had been waiting for an hour. I had already shown him the remarkably ingenious instrument of death designed by the murderer of Idomeno Persano, and he had scrutinized the post-card, only to confess himself as baffled as I by any meaning it might have. Yet he had an unshakable faith in my companion's striking faculties of deduction and logical synthesis and made no complaint at Pons's delay.

Pons slipped so silently into the room as to startle us.

"Ah, Taylor, I trust you have not been kept waiting long," he said.

"Only an hour," answered the Inspector.

"Pray forgive me. I thought, insofar as I had succeeded in identifying the murderer of Idomeno Persano, I might trouble also to look him up for you."

"Mr. Pons, you're joking!"

"On the contrary. You will find him at the 'Sailor's Rest' in Wapping. He is a short, dark-skinned man of Italian or Spanish parentage. His hair is dark and curly, but showing grey at the temples. He carries a bad scar on his temple above and a little retracted from his right eye. There is a lesser scar on his throat. His name is Angelo Perro. His motive was vengeance. Persano had appeared against him in the United States a dozen years ago. Lose no time in taking him; once he learns Persano is dead, he will leave

London at the earliest moment. Come around tomorrow, and you shall have all the facts."

Inspector Taylor was off with scarcely more than a mutter of thanks. It did not occur to him to question Pons's dictum.

"Surely this is somewhat extraordinary even for you, Pons," I said, before the echo of Taylor's footsteps had died down the stairs.

"You exaggerate my poor powers, Parker," answered Pons. "The matter was most elementary, I assure you."

"I'm afraid it's quite beyond me. Consider—you knew nothing of this man, Persano. You made no inquiries. . . ."

"On the contrary, I knew a good deal about him," interrupted Pons. "He was an expatriate American of independent means. He dabbled in entomology. He lived alone. He had no telephone. He was manifestly content to live in seclusion. Why?—if not because he feared someone? If he feared someone, I submit it is logical to assume that the source of his fear lay in the United States."

"But what manner of thing did he fear that he could be upset by this card?" I asked.

Pons tossed the card over to me. "Though it may tell you nothing, Parker, manifestly it conveyed something to Persano."

"It could surely not have been in the address. It must be in the picture."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Pons, rubbing his hands together. "You show marked improvement, Parker. Pray proceed."

"Well, then," I went on, emboldened by his enthusiasm, "the picture can hardly convey more than that a big fat man is running away from a little dog who has broken his leash."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you!"

I gazed at him, I fear, in utter astonishment. "But, Pons, what other meaning has it?"

"None but that. Coupled with the suggestion of the holiday which appears in the commercial lettering, the card could readily be interpreted to say: 'Your holiday is over. The dog is loose.' A fat man running to escape a dog. Persano was corpulent."

"Indeed he was!"

"Very well, then. The post-card is the first incidence of a 'dog' in the little drama which is drawing to a close at Inspector Taylor's capable hands in Wapping. Mrs. White, you recalled to my attention only a few hours ago, told us that her late employer muttered 'the dog' several times before he lapsed into silence. That was the second occurrence. And then, finally, this matchbox cover



announces 'Little dog catches big cat.' My dear fellow, could anything be plainer?"

"I hardly know what to say. I have still ringing in my ears your emphatic pronouncement that there was no dog in the matter," I said coldly.

"I believe my words were 'no such dog.' Your reference was clearly to a quadruped, a member of the *Canis* group of *Carnivora*. There is no such dog."

"You speak increasingly in riddles."

"Perhaps one of these cuttings may help."

As he spoke, Pons took from his pocket three extracts cut from the *Chicago Tribune* of seven weeks before. He selected one and handed it to me.

"That should elucidate the matter for you, Parker."

The material was a short news-article. I read it with care.

"Chicago, June 29: Prisoners paroled from Ft. Leavenworth yesterday included four Chicagoans. They were Mao Hsueh-Chang, Angelo Perro, Robert Salliker, and Franz Witkenstein. They were convicted in 1914 on a charge of transporting and distributing narcotics. They had served eleven years. Evidence against them was furnished by a fifth member of the gang known as 'Big Id' Persano, who was given a suspended sentence for his part in their conviction. 'Big Id' dropped out of sight immediately after the trial. The four ex-convicts plan to return to Chicago."

Two of the convicts were pictured in the article; one of them was Perro. Pons must have made the rounds of hotels and public houses in Wapping, showing Perro's photograph, in order to find him at the "Sailor's Rest."

"I take it 'Big Id' was our client's employer," I said, handing the clipping back to him.

"Precisely."

"But pray tell me, how did you arrive at Perro as the murderer?"

"Dear me, Parker, surely that is plain as a pikestaff?"

I shook my head. "I should have looked to the Chinaman. The device of the worm is Oriental in concept."

"An admirable deduction. Quite probably they were all in it together and the worm was the work of the Chinaman. But the murderer was Perro. I fear your education in the Humanities has been sadly neglected."

"The card, which was postmarked but two days after this item appeared in the papers, was an announcement from a friend of

Persano's to tell him that the 'little dog' was free. The 'little dog' undoubtedly had information about Persano's whereabouts, and knew how to find him, even if Persano perhaps did not realize how much of his life in London was known in America. Persano understood the card at once.

"Had Perro not wished Persano to know who meant to kill him, I might have had a far more difficult time of it. 'Little dog catches big cat.' Perro is a little man. Persano was big. Perro is the Spanish for 'dog.' It should not be necessary to add that Persano is the Spanish for 'Persian.' And a Persian is a variety of cat.

"An ingenious little puzzle, Parker, however elementary in final analysis."

## *The Adventure of the Retired Novelist*

THOUGH SOLAR PONS does not consider it among his best adventures, the case of the late famed man of letters, Mr. Thomas Wilgreve, has always held for me a fascination of which I cannot rid myself. It was late one night in October 1926, when Pons and I were returning from Covent Garden that Pons gripped my arm, not far from our lodgings in Praed Street, brought me to a halt, and pointed upward to our windows, bright with light. Silhouetted against one of them was the profile head of a man. Pons studied it for a moment; then he turned to me with raised eyebrows.

"Do you recognize that profile, Parker?"

"Well, it is certainly not John Barrymore's—unless he is in disguise," I answered. I shrugged and admitted that I did not recognize him, despite the feeling that there was something very familiar about the silhouette.

"In his own field he is a distinguished gentleman. That long, singularly lean face, that straight nose, those bushy eyebrows, and that affected mane of hair all suggest a picture reproduced in photogravure by the metropolitan papers at least once a month. What would you say if I were to suggest the author of *Victoria*?"

"Thomas Wilgreve! Of course—I knew I had seen that profile somewhere."

"It does suggest Barrymore," admitted Pons, smiling dryly.

In spite of his leonine and impressive appearance, Thomas Wilgreve was very taciturn and almost humble in bearing, as is the case with so many men of genuine stature who have little inclination to be pompous and self-important, and no stomach at all for arrogance. He apologized for taking the liberty to invade our rooms, singling out Pons by the same means used by Pons to identify him, and explained that it was very seldom that he left his home in St. John's Wood and that, once having left it, he was loath to return without accomplishing what he had set out to do. He waited while Pons and I took off our outer clothing, and then a little diffidently resumed.

"What I came to see you about was to ask whether you can investigate a small matter that seems to concern me in some inexplicable manner."

Pons hesitated, avoiding Wilgreve's inquiring eyes. "I should say it depends upon the nature of the affair."

"I've an idea that this matter will interest you, Mr. Pons," said the retired novelist. "It takes a bit to stir me, for I'm used to the most intricate subtleties and variations of writing and the imagination, and ordinary events appear to me for the most part singularly banal."

The novelist paused and took from his wallet a piece of paper. He put on his pince-nez, and read it over very carefully to himself, as if to make certain beyond question that he had got the right paper. Then he passed the paper on to Pons, who read it and handed it over to me, after which he took it back and studied it, an enigmatic smile playing over his saturnine face. The document was a short, informal note, an invitation—

"MY DEAR WILGREVE,

"I am briefly up from the country, and have but a limited time at my disposal. Yet I do want to see you very much. I find it absolutely impossible to run out to St. John's Wood, but I hope you will not find it too much trouble to join me for dinner and perhaps the evening on Friday, the seventh. I will wait for you at Claridge's, the usual place.

"LAKIN."

"Lakin is the Essex novelist and poet," said Pons thoughtfully. "I take it you went, he was not there, he had not been there, he was not up from the country."

"Yes, yes, exactly," said Wilgreve, smiling delightedly. "Your talents are amazing, sir—but of course, it is elementary, is it not? It would almost have to be so, would it not? Well, that is the way things turned out; I went, he was not there, he had not been there, no word had been left, I waited a reasonable time, I returned home. I made no attempt to solve the riddle; I was annoyed, I thought someone had taken the opportunity to make a joke at my expense. Yet I had to admit that it was well done; the writing was very much like Lakin's—I had never a doubt of it when I read it. It was, in sort, precisely the kind of note Lakin would have written; next day I telephoned him, and discovered, as you guessed, that he had not been in London at all."

He became a little more animated, taking off his pince-nez and leaning forward to tap Pons's knee. "Now then, Mr. Pons—almost

two weeks later, that is, last night—an extraordinary event took place. I had come out to the front steps for a breath of air, when I was a witness to a sudden accident—or rather, to what appeared to be an accident. Before I quite knew what had happened, two gentlemen came running to where I stood and insisted that I accompany them as a material witness, the child's life might be in danger, not a moment was to be lost. I did not hesitate, despite my reluctance; I stepped back into my house, turned out the light, and pausing only to take my hat, I accompanied them. I see now on mature reflection that it was a foolhardy thing to do; but in the excitement of the moment, what more natural! In any case, I was hustled into a waiting car and driven a short distance, where I was taken into what appeared to be a small waiting-room, where one of the gentlemen very courteously asked me to stop, an officer would be along to take my statement as soon as possible. Then, in a very agitated manner, he vanished into an inner room. I saw no one for an hour; then I got up and tried the inner door; it was locked; my knocks brought no response. I tried the outer door in some alarm, thinking that I was the victim of some scheme; but it was open, I was free to go. Naturally, I did not know what to do; I confess that I waited a while longer, and then took my departure, utterly mystified.

"When I let myself into my house, Mr. Pons, I took off my hat in the darkness and then went over to turn on the lamp. Now, sir, my reading light is a table-lamp with a green shade; it throws a strong light within the room, but seems to throw only a subdued glow to anyone outside. As I reached down for the switch, I was aware of a warm glow; I touched the bulb—it was warm—as warm as if it had just been put out. Yet I had turned it out approximately two hours before! Hurriedly I checked all the doors and windows, but nothing was amiss; all were locked save the front door through which I had come."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pons, his eyes narrowing, the smile on his lips persisting.

"I thought you would be interested, Mr. Pons. Now, then, after I had made this search, I observed that the door to the attic stood open. I live in a one-storey bungalow with an attic of good size. I do not keep much in the attic—some books, papers, magazines—the natural accumulation of anyone in my profession; and some of the old furniture that was in the house when I bought it. This furniture

had been pulled around, despite some manifest effort to conceal the fact."

Pons touched his earlobe thoughtfully. "When did you buy the house?"

"About ten and a half years ago."

"You bought it furnished, apparently. From whom?"

"From the executors of an estate."

"Whose estate?"

"I believe it was a widow's—a Mrs. Paul Greenbie."

A smile touched Pons's lips, and his interest manifestly grew. "You say you kept 'some' of the old furniture in the attic. What did you do with the rest of it?"

"I sold it to a dealer in Cheapside. As far as I know, he still has it."

"The address of your place, if I recall it correctly, is Seven Cavendish Road."

Wilgreve nodded.

"I take it you are aware of no enemies who might choose this way of troubling you?"

Wilgreve shrugged. "None. People who differ from my ideas, of course, and who can be bitter; but no one who could be called an enemy."

Pons produced the letter once more. "Do you have the envelope in which this was posted?"

Apologetically, Wilgreve surrendered it.

"Now, just let us see what we can make of this," pursued Pons, scrutinizing the paper and envelope carefully. "The writing is effortless; so that it is not too much to suppose the gentleman an accomplished forger. It is certainly no task to find samples of Lakin's writing, but more of one to copy it expertly enough to take in an old friend. We may assume that the writer, aided by a confederate, is anxious to obtain entrance to your house without needlessly setting you on his track. If this were not so, he could very easily have invaded your home, bludgeoned you, and gone about his nefarious business without troubling about the consequences. No, for a very good reason, he did not wish you to know that he had an interest in your premises, and he went to considerable pains to deceive you—witness this forged note, and even more, the obviously staged accident."

"Moreover, he has studied your habits; he will have known you

are of a retiring and sedentary nature, and so contrived ingeniously to decoy you away from the house. Whatever it is he wants there remains to be discovered."

"But that is what is puzzling," interrupted Wilgreve. "I own no valuables, I do not keep money in the house, my manuscripts are given to charitable institutions for sale—I have nothing of value."

"Does not then the possibility suggest itself that you may possess something of value without being aware of it?" asked Pons.

"No, sir," answered Wilgreve with alacrity. "I am fairly well informed in the matter of antiques and the like; I own nothing of value save a few signed first editions—and these, you will admit, have at best a fluctuating value."

Pons nodded, his brow furrowed in deep thought. He held paper and envelope up to the light. "Posted in St. John's Wood, I see. This would suggest that you or your house at least have been kept under observation. A good grade of paper, too."

"Yes, it is precisely the kind Lakin uses."

"Indeed! What care!" said Pons, shaking his head. "Tell me, Mr. Wilgreve, how many people would you say were involved in the 'accident' you supposedly witnessed?"

"Why, I suppose five or six—"

"The writer, his confederate, and perhaps four cronies—or actors employed for the occasion. Most likely actors. Could you identify any of them?"

"I doubt it," replied Wilgreve. "The two gentlemen who approached me, perhaps, but no more."

Pons was now silent for so long that Wilgreve was finally moved to inquire whether or not he would undertake to investigate the matter. But clearly Pons had already made his decision; he nodded and asked for the name and address of the dealer to whom Wilgreve had sold the furniture.

"T. Woodly & Sons, 231A Cheapside."

"Now, then, Mr. Wilgreve, I shall want to examine your attic."

"I will expect you tomorrow, Mr. Pons."

"The matter may be more urgent than you think. There is no time like the present, Mr. Wilgreve. Come along, Parker."

He came to his feet with animation, brushing aside Wilgreve's doubt, and reached for his Inverness.

The novelist's home was easily identified from his description of it, not so much because his description had been so explicit, but

because it was the only house on the street which was obviously of one storey. It was tastefully but simply furnished, but Pons scarcely glanced around him, merely flicking his eyes toward the lamp which Wilgreve said was warm to his touch; he went directly to the attic stairs and vanished into the darkness of that room under the roof, both Wilgreve and myself following to the threshold, from which we observed Pons using his pocket-flash to make the most careful examination of the furniture stored there, painstakingly scrutinizing piece after piece, without a word in our direction, until he had finished almost an hour later.

"Have you discovered anything?" asked Wilgreve when he came toward us.

"Yes. Within a few days you may expect an inquiry about that part of the furniture you sold."

"Shall I answer it?"

"By all means," said Pons, smiling cryptically.

Then, pressing the novelist to lose no time in notifying Pons if any further suspicious circumstances designed to take him from his home took place — though clearly he doubted that anything further would happen — he bade him good-night, and we left the house.

Upon reaching our lodgings once more, Pons sat for some time in cogent silence. He looked at the letter which he had retained, examined the envelope repeatedly, observing casually that the writer had been in dress-clothes, for a smear of ink carried the impression of a weave with which he was familiar, and finally ended his period of thought by telephoning the director of Actors' Services, late as the hour was, and asking that four or five actors who could reenact a street accident — preferably someone who had done similar work before — be sent to Praed Street in the morning. Saying nothing further about Thomas Wilgreve's curious narrative, he then retired.

Promptly at nine o'clock the following morning, three men and a woman from Actors' Services presented themselves at Number Seven. Pons was waiting for them, and lost no time in examining them. Had any one of them done anything of the sort before? Three had not, but one gentleman said that he had been required to take part in the re-enactment of an accident in St. John's Wood only two nights ago. Clearly, this was what Pons had expected; he dismissed the other three with their fees, and bade Mr. Nickerton, the fourth member of the group, to sit down.



"Now, sir, I want to place before you six photographs. I want you to study them. I want you to tell me whether you have ever seen any one of those faces before."

Nickerton's lined face betrayed his perplexity, but he did not demur while Pons went to the cabinet where he kept his files of data on crimes and criminals, a practise fairly common among both professional and amateur detectives in London, as well as the custom of the police. From his files he took the photographs in question and, without a word, came back to the table and arranged them before Mr. Nickerton.

The actor thereupon studied them in silence for some time; four of them he discarded immediately; of the other two, he was clearly not certain. Pons began to fidget a little, tugging at the lobe of his ear, and finally he could contain himself no longer.

"Well, it is perfectly obvious that you detect some similarity, Mr. Nickerton. Perhaps it would help if you looked at those faces as if they wore moustaches or beards—whatever it is that impedes your identification."

Mr. Nickerton's response was prompt. "If this gentleman wore a moustache, I would say it was he who directed the re-enactment of the accident in which I took part last Wednesday."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons, obviously pleased.

Forthwith he permitted Mr. Nickerton to take his leave, while he put all but the identified photograph back into his files. I reached over and took up the photograph; it was that of a distinguished-looking man of middle age, wearing a monocle, full-faced and keen of eye.

"And who is this?" I asked.

"You may well inquire," answered Pons, chuckling. "It is none other than the author of Mr. Wilgreve's curious tale—Guy Pilkington, one of the most accomplished forgers in England, if not, indeed, in Europe. He was released from prison only a few months ago. He had forged a cheque on the Bank of England, and would have got away scot-free if he had not had the bad fortune to become involved in an accident on the road to Dover."

"What can he want of Wilgreve?"

"I think that is reasonably elementary, Parker," said Pons shortly. "He was a one-time associate of Culross Parey, who died in prison about eight years ago. You will remember Parey as the star performer in many a celebrated and daring theft. He was imprisoned for the theft of the Peacock's Eye; you will remember he

went boldly to the house of its owner, presented a demand in its owner's writing, and made off, in the character of a diamond merchant, with the stone. A child's chance photograph of the house while he stood on the steps was the one piece of evidence too damning for him to overcome. Parey was a brother of Mrs. Paul Greenbie. But come," he said, suddenly animated, "we have work to do. Let us be off."

We had not far to go, for Pons led the way to the Praed Street station, and there we took the Underground. At Moorgate we came up once more into the morning's now thinning mists, and walked down Princess Street to Cheapside. Pons had no difficulty locating Number 231A, and briskly entered the shop.

A rotund little man wearing a skullcap and octagonal glasses rose from his place behind a counter, and came around to confront us.

"Mr. T. Woodly, I presume?" inquired Pons.

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"I am Solar Pons, Mr. Woodly. Some time ago you purchased some furniture from Thomas Wilgreve, the novelist, of St. John's Wood. If you are still in possession of those pieces, I should like to examine them."

"They are very ordinary pieces, Mr. Pons," said Woodly dubiously. "I can show you many better things."

"No doubt. But it is these pieces I wish to see. I take it you still have them?"

"Lot forty-seven, Mr. Pons. You'll find it ticketed if you go down the shop and turn into the room at the right. There are only four pieces—an old armchair, a sofa, and two occasional chairs."

"Thank you. I'll just go along and look at them."

Forthwith Pons strode into the darkness of the shop's rear, turned to the right at the end of the little more than passage which made up the width of 231A, and found himself in a sizable storeroom. With the aid of his pocket-flash, he located lot number 47, and thereupon he began to scrutinize the furniture with the same microscopic care with which he had looked at those pieces remaining in Wilgreve's attic. Not a sound escaped him, save only a small cry of interest, followed by the appearance of his head above the back of the armchair, to caution me to watch for Mr. Woodly. I saw him take from his pocket the ponderous pocket-knife which was all things to Pons and begin to work at the fastenings of the chair, but what he did there, I could not see; however, in a few moments he left his place and came whispering to me for a scrap of paper,

which I tore from my notebook and gave to him. I saw him last writing something on the paper, after which he completed his work on the furniture and joined me.

Mr. Woodly waited for us. "Well, sir, you found it as I told you, eh? Quite ordinary. I have some good Sheraton. . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. Woodly, but I am not interested at this time. However, I daresay you will shortly have a further inquiry about this furniture, and unless I am very badly mistaken you will have a handsome offer for it. By all means get as much as you can for it; the purchaser will be very anxious to possess the lot."

With this cryptic statement, Pons left the shop and strode out into the occasional sunlight now breaking through the light fog of the October morning. He walked with a gleam of good humour in his eyes, so that I knew his examination had not been fruitless. Yet he said nothing, and I would not ask until we had reached our rooms and discovered that Mrs. Johnson had left a note to say that Thomas Wilgreve had telephoned; he had received an inquiry about the furniture, and had answered it, in accordance with Pons's instructions.

"You might just telephone Wilgreve, Parker, and ask him to step around here at two o'clock this afternoon if he cares for an explanation of his mystery," said Pons.

"You've solved it then?"

"Oh, yes—disappointingly elementary, and yet not without aspects of interest." He shrugged. "And by the way, I wish you would telephone Lord Venler and tell him that I would be obliged to him if he would call at our lodgings this afternoon at the same hour."

"But what is it all about?"

Pons chuckled. "Well, Parker, you have all the facts. It should be obvious to you as it was to me from the moment Wilgreve concluded his curious narrative."

"I can make nothing of it, save that apparently something of value is connected with the furniture."

"Come, come—you are warm, but how carefully you tread!" Laughing, he retreated to his crime file, and left me to the telephone.

The novelist, curious and still perplexed, arrived but a few moments before Lord Venler; he had hardly seated himself when Mrs. Johnson announced Lord Venler, a tall, grim-faced man in his

sixties, wearing impeccable afternoon dress. He fixed his keen grey eyes on my companion and bowed.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Pons?"

"Yes. I believe I have something that belongs to your lordship."

So saying, Pons reached casually into the pocket of his jacket and took from it a rough stone, which he put on the table before Lord Venler. His lordship's expression was almost ludicrous in its amazement. His eyes widened, his lips parted, he took a step forward; then he snatched the stone from the table and held it up before his eyes. Only after he had thoroughly examined it did he turn to Pons.

"It is the Peacock's Eye! Where did you find it?"

"Just where Parey put it—into the padding on the back of an old armchair in his sister's house in St. John's Wood. You will remember that Scotland Yard was able to account for every moment of Parey's time except for a half hour which he claimed to have spent on the Underground; he spent it in his sister's house, quite possibly unknown to her, and hid the stone in the armchair there."

"But he died without revealing anything!"

"Quite so. But one of his associates was in prison with him—the man who wrote the actual note, Guy Pilkington. There was always a reasonable doubt that Parey committed that forgery; it was too skillful; your writing was perfectly reproduced, and so, too, your signature. Pilkington was released from prison but a short time ago, and began his search for the stone as soon as he could do so. That brought him to Mr. Wilgreve, the novelist, and Mr. Wilgreve sought the aid of my modest powers."

After Lord Venler had gone, Pons gave his attention to the novelist. "Do you understand the matter now, Mr. Wilgreve?"

"Yes—except for knowing why Pilkington was so cautious."

"Why, to avoid the very contingency he precipitated by his caution—sending you to any authority who might be able to rationalize the problem and so reach the Peacock's Eye before he did. Hence his extreme care about Lakin's signature and his carefully staged accident, which, if you had not gone from that office to which they had taken you, would doubtless have been very reasonably explained to you. You left the waiting-room before Pilkington and his confederate could complete the mumbo-jumbo of taking your deposition; doubtless Pilkington's companion was at fault, for Pilkington himself would never have been guilty of permitting you to go before he could allay any suspicions you might

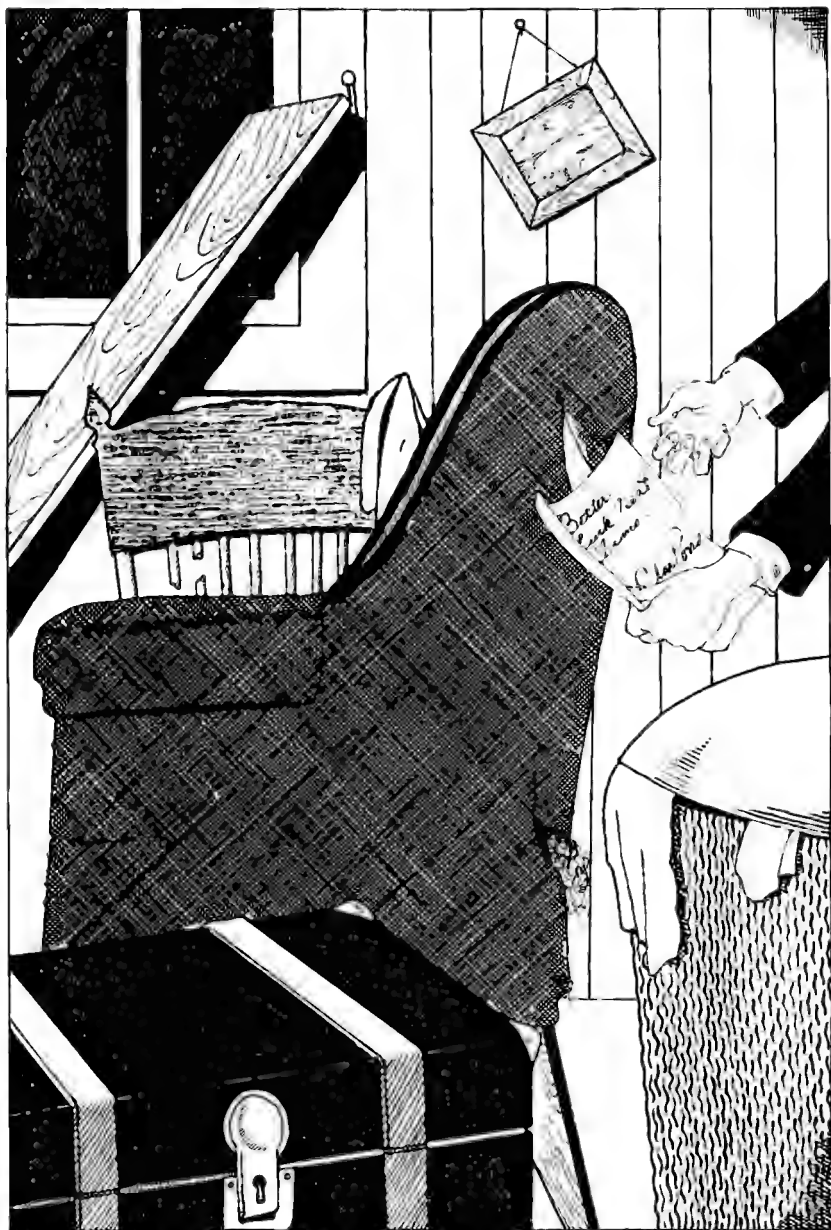
have. Pilkington might have obtained a key to your house from Parey; he might have managed an impression unknown to Parey or even to yourself; that he had one is apparent. We may logically assume that though Pilkington learned that Parey had hidden the stone in a piece of furniture, he knew, no more than I, *which* piece."

Mr. Wilgreve stood, preparing to take his leave. "Then it was he who wrote to inquire what I had done with the rest of the furniture?"

"Precisely."

"And he will go to Woodly and buy the furniture, I suppose. I should like to see his face when he opens up the armchair."

Reaching for his pipe, Pons smiled. "He should have no cause for complaint," he said dryly. "In place of the stone I left him a receipt, over my signature."





## *The Adventure of the Missing Tenants*

IN THE EARLY hours of a winter night within the first decade I shared with my friend, Solar Pons, I was awakened by his hand on my shoulder, and his voice at my ear, "We are about to have a visitor who will not be put off. You may care to sit in, Parker."

"What time is it?" I asked, struggling awake.

"Two o'clock."

"Two o'clock!" I cried. "What is it, then?"

"Some little crisis at the Foreign Office," replied Pons. "Bancroft is on his way."

I was just emerging into our sitting-room, tying the cord of my dressing-gown, when Pons's brother, Bancroft, having come noiselessly up the stairs of 7B, opened the door and stepped into our quarters. He was an impressively tall, formidable man, with a mind far keener than my companion's, for which I had had Pons's word on several occasions.

He nodded in my direction and said to Pons without preamble, "Erocole d'Oro, the Italian consul, has disappeared. The Italian government has begun to make some inquiries, and the situation is delicate."

"You ought to have called in the Pinkertons," said Pons. "*They* never sleep."

"They can afford not to; the Foreign Office cannot," said Bancroft. "You are needlessly waspish. We have not seen fit to apply to the Yard. There is good reason here for the utmost discretion in this inquiry."

"I fancy there is a woman other than the Countess involved," observed Pons.

"Elementary. Spare me these trifling exercises of yours," said Bancroft testily. "But, of course, there *may* be some involvement with a woman, since d'Oro was last seen entering the house in Orrington Crescent which he had been using for some months as a rendezvous for his amatory exploits."

"Ah, these Italians," mused Pons. "I fancy *their* Foreign Office could be demoralized by an attractive woman."

"You know of Count d'Oro?"



"I met him socially some years ago. Since 1921, he has been the Italian consul. Born in 1882. Now forty-four. Privately tutored, some study at the University of Genoa. At one time rumoured to have some connection with the Mafiosa. His hobby: entomology. One of his monographs is used as a standard reference in the field. Married in 1900 to Harriet Jackson, niece of the Earl of Ellenbroke. No children."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Bancroft, "I know these details."

"Of the house in Orrington Crescent, however, I know nothing," said Pons. "Presumably you do." Suddenly a light broke upon Pons's face. "Unless, that is, it is Number 27."

"It is."

"Ah, that puts a different light on the matter. A house notorious in the annals of London's unsolved mysteries. Let us now have the details."

"D'Oro left home three days ago, early in the evening, bound for the house in Orrington Crescent. His wife was told his destination, of course—she had been given to understand when d'Oro leased the house a month ago, that it was to be used for clandestine meetings concerned with the affairs of government—bluntly, espionage. I rather think the woman is convinced that some foreign agent is at the bottom of d'Oro's disappearance. It is not impossible."

"Which means that someone at the Foreign Office—characteristically—entertains the same suspicion."

Bancroft brushed this impatiently away. "D'Oro was reported missing two days ago, after a full day during which he had not appeared either at his home or at his official quarters. No doubt the facts of his vanishing had also been transmitted to his government, for since yesterday we have had representations made to His Majesty's Government about d'Oro's safety."

"We have naturally examined the house. He had certainly reached it, and he was alone there—one does not customarily engage in this kind of dalliance in the company of a third person—and he had made some preparations to receive the lady—a Miss Violet Carson of Upper Hampstead, a secretary by profession. The hour of their rendezvous had been set for ten o'clock, and the lady—in accordance with the usual arrangements—arrived by cab at that hour, and let herself into the house. All evidence plainly indicated that her arrival was expected—the house was lit with subdued lights, d'Oro had bathed and was clad only in dressing-robe and slippers. All was as usual, except that he himself was not there."

This was Miss Carson's seventh rendezvous with d'Oro. She said, on interrogation, that she had 'got ready'—by which I take it she had undressed and got into bed, which had been turned back, and lay there waiting for d'Oro to make his appearance. She thought that perhaps he had gone below stairs for champagne or something other to serve her, as was his custom, but presently, hearing no sound in the house beyond the ticking of a clock, she got out of bed, slipped into the robe d'Oro kept for the use of such women as shared his nights there, and went to look for him. She searched the house. There was no sign of him. His car—a small Fiat—was in the adjoining garage, and the garage locked; it is still there. Some of our people have been through the house. Nothing untoward has been found. No sign of forced entry. Nothing. It is as if d'Oro simply vanished all in an instant. Miss Carson waited for an hour; then she dressed again, called a cab, and went back to her flat.

"A significant factor—if we can rely on Miss Carson—is that d'Oro telephoned her at a quarter to nine to let her know he had reached the Orrington house. Between that hour and her arrival a light snow fell. Miss Carson says that there were no footprints in the snow on the walk leading to the house, which suggests that d'Oro either left soon after he had telephoned—which is unlikely in view of his having bathed and shaved after he had telephoned—presumptively—or went by another door. Of course, by the time his absence had been reported, the snow had thawed away.

"But you shall see for yourself. I am going home. The car will return for you within the hour. That will give you ample time to dress and take breakfast, if you need it. Here are the keys."

He threw them to the table, and took his leave as noiselessly and unceremoniously as he had come.

"We are all presumed to be at the instant service of His Majesty's Government, Parker," said Pons, smiling. "Come, let us get dressed."

"You said it was a house 'notorious in the annals of London's unsolved mysteries,' " I said.

"So it is. A writer in the *Chronicle*—one of those devotees of that vein of fantasy known as science-fiction—scarcely three months ago wrote a sensational article about it under the heading, 'Orrington Crescent House Hole in Space?' speculating about a favourite gambit of investigators of curious, unexplained facts—like Charles Fort—that strange, motiveless disappearances—of, for instance, persons seen walking in at one end of a street and never seen to

emerge at the other, vanishing utterly—as having stepped into ‘holes in space’ or into other dimensions, or some such phenomenal ‘openings’ in time or space. Number 27 lends itself very well to such an article for the press. D’Oro is the fourth resident of it to disappear in the course of less than five years. All, if memory serves me, vanished in very much the same fashion, without motive, without trace.”

He crossed the room and took down one of the files in which he kept cuttings about crimes and criminals. As I dressed in my room, I could hear his going through material that was never in the best of order, though Pons maintained a loosely alphabetical arrangement frequently disorganized by the hasty addition of new data. From time to time I caught muttered references to crimes he passed over—the case of Williams, the owl burglar, the Van Houtain murder, the multiple murders on Illington Moor.

“Ah, here we are!” he cried as I came back into the sitting-room, his keen eyes rapidly scanning the cuttings before him. “The house appears to have been built in 1920, by Dr. Roland Borstad, son of the one-time ambassador to Germany, Henry C. Borstad. The younger Borstad was a surgeon with an interest in psychoanalysis. Author of three published papers on psychoanalysis, and one monograph on Dr. Sigmund Freud. He appears also to have had some ability in architecture and undertook part of the building of his home. Overwork brought on a nervous breakdown, after recovery from which he went to live in the Orrington Crescent house, from which he vanished on December 17th, 1921. The papers made much of the fact that Borstad had evidently been planning a journey, for he had withdrawn a large sum of money, and his bags, already packed, were standing in the vestibule in preparation for his departure.”

“I know the Borstad papers,” I put in. “A brilliant young man. His death was a decided loss to psychoanalysis. As I recall it, he had some very advanced, unorthodox theories, and there was conflict with his peers. They fell out about his radical theories and experiments in the domain of pain and pain therapy, and this ultimately brought about a break in their relations, endangering his position in the hospital where he was briefly the resident physician, and ultimately brought on a nervous breakdown.”

“The house stood empty for over a year. Then it was turned over to be let, though its ownership remained in the Borstad family

where it presumably still is. The second disappearance was on February 24th, 1923; it was that of Clyde Lee, son of the Duke of Dunwich. After Lee, Mr. and Mrs. John Tomlins and their family took the house. They remained for only five months, complaining that now and then distant sounds disturbed them. They made no charge against the house as 'haunted.' Tomlins, an engineer, said that the house obviously lay in a place that echoed sounds from far away—chiefly mechanical. The third disappearance was that of Howard Eliot, a writer of short stories and sensational newspaper pieces on occult subjects; he had taken the house because of its reputation and meant to 'lay its ghost,' as he put it, since there had been occasional reports of ghostly figures in the grounds. He vanished on May 17th, 1925. As in this fourth disappearance, investigation disclosed no motive for any one of the disappearances. Dunwich waited on the arrival of ransom notes; none was received."

"That is certainly a curious record!"

"Is it not!" He stood for a few moments tugging at an earlobe. "It has, however, some parallels. None of the missing tenants at the Orrington Crescent house was married. Except for Lee, who had a man-servant and had the house done by an occasional cleaning woman, each of the missing tenants lived alone; and Lee disappeared on his man's night off. What does this suggest to you, Parker?"

"A necessary condition," I said.

"Which in turn implies a related plan."

"What connection, if any, was there among the men who disappeared?"

"Other than the common tenancy of the house in Orrington Crescent, none has been turned up. They were not known to one another." He shrugged. "But it is idle to speculate with so little knowledge available. Bancroft will have a dossier on d'Oro in my hands by the time we return. Let us just have a look at the house."

He crossed to his chamber to dress.

The house in Orrington Crescent was, for lack of any classification, late Edwardian. It was without the ornateness of many Edwardian houses, but its lines—what could be seen of them through the massed foliage of many bushes—though suggesting the Georgian, were a far remove from the classical. It struck me, in the wan light of a lamppost set in the street outside the bordering

hedge, as very much an expression of the undisciplined architectural preferences of its builder. Perhaps the late Dr. Borstad had designed it himself.

Its interior, however, was essentially simple. The front door opened upon a vestibule; this in turn opened directly upon a sitting-room, adequately but not richly furnished, dominated by a fireplace which bore no signs of recent use. A table-lamp was lit on a reading table next to a stuffed chair; on the table a book lay face down, as if someone had been interrupted at reading. It was, I saw, not surprisingly, a collection of Leopardi's poems, in Italian—clearly the book the Count d'Oro had been reading while he waited upon the arrival of Miss Violet Carson.

This room, in turn, led to two bed-chambers, a bathroom, a kitchen and adjacent pantry, a study or library, and a compact little room that might have served at one time as a laboratory—something which the original owner of the house might well have put to use, though of all its original contents only a small microscope, a retort, and some of the lesser paraphernalia of the surgeon stood on shelves in a small glass case on one wall. The furnishings in the house were sturdy, useful pieces, all for the most part ordinary, severe, and entirely unornamented.

There was no basement beneath the building, though there was a rear entrance to the house, and an enclosed stairway led to the top floor. This floor consisted of one large room, just above the study, a bathroom, and two other rooms of almost equal size, opposite the larger room. None of the rooms bore any evidence of ever having been furnished, though all were scrupulously clean, even to the obvious scrubbing of the variegated-width oak flooring. The chimney leading up from the fireplace below stood apart from the wall, which was set back from it, and was windowless, with some shelving boards piled beside the uncommonly massive chimney, as if Borstad had meant to line this wall, too, as the wall below had been lined, with books.

Pons examined each room cursorily, then returned to the head of the stairs and stood in deep thought, caressing the lobe of his left ear.

"Does not this cleanliness surprise you, Parker?" he asked presently.

"I can't say that it does."

"Curious. Most curious. Are we to believe that Count d'Oro

scrubbed down the floors of rooms for which he had no use before taking his mistress to bed?"

"Hardly. It strikes me it is you who are now doing what you so frequently accuse me of doing—overlooking the obvious. He had some charwoman in to do it."

"Possible, if improbable," said Pons.

He led the way back downstairs and once more made a tour of the rooms, pausing to examine each more closely. Everything was in order, save in the bedroom, where the bed still stood as Miss Carson had left it—turned carelessly back and disarranged as it would be had someone lain in it for a while, as Miss Carson had testified she had done while waiting on the appearance of her lover. Only one pillow showed any indentation, and that slight.

"I never cease to marvel at the sexual habits of my fellow men," said Pons, as he gazed at the bed. "To go to so much trouble and expense for a little casual dalliance!"

"Spoken like a true abstainer," I said. "We are not all so abstemious."

"Why not install her here permanently?" mused Pons, though it seemed to me that he was not really concerned with this question.

"Elementary!" I replied instantly. "Because d'Oro did not always meet the same woman here."

"Ah, Parker—you are wiser in this aspect of the world," said Pons, his eyes dancing.

"I will not deny it," I said.

"But let us look into the scene with more care," said Pons, then, leading the way back to the sitting-room. "It is evidently from this room that d'Oro took his departure, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Now it is patent that d'Oro was interrupted at his reading, for the Leopardi is turned face down. He could have risen to go into another room—to go outside; he could have simply lain back to rest; he could have grown tired—the possibilities, while not endless, are varied. On the other hand, he may even have become aware of some unusual sound—or smell."

At this, Pons flashed a curious glance at me. "Is there not an uncommon odour in this room? Perhaps my use of the weed has troubled my sense of smell."

"I noticed how clean the room smells," I said.

"Antiseptic?" ventured Pons.

I agreed that the room had an antiseptic odour, as if it had been

thoroughly cleaned. But there was nothing to meet the eye that gave evidence of anything more than ordinary cleaning.

Pons now began to walk around the room. He made a circuit of the walls, paused at the fireplace, and came back to the chair d'Oro had left. He dropped to his knees, took his magnifying glass from the inner pocket of his coat, and began to examine the floor around the chair, crawling about in an ever widening circle. His glance darted here and there; from time to time he bore down upon a chosen spot, putting his glass to use, his keen eyes missing nothing, his face, feral in appearance when he was engaged in so intent an examination, betraying nothing.

When he came to his feet again, his face was a study in perplexity. "This room is a marvel of cleanliness," he said reflectively. "I submit that that is extraordinary indeed."

"Why should it be? D'Oro," I said, gesturing toward the Leopardi poems, and the books on the shelves crowding the fireplace wall, "is obviously a man of taste. Such a man would hardly want to receive his mistress in a setting lacking for cleanliness."

"That is surely well put, Parker," agreed Pons. "However, I submit you have forgotten something—this house was surely examined with some care by men from the Foreign Office; Bancroft inferred as much. There is everything to show that this room was thoroughly cleaned since then. I have not found so much as a grain of sand in the carpet."

"Incredible!"

"You may well say so," said Pons.

"On second thought," I put in—"wouldn't it be likely that investigators from the Foreign Office may have vacuumed the carpet in search of some clue in the dust?"

"Such matters are usually too mundane for the Foreign Office."

"Even under pressure from the Italian government?"

Pons was lost in thought; he did not answer. Having completed his examination of the floor, he was now gazing at the walls of the room. He crossed to the street side of the house and scrutinized the window-sills and frames; he did the same with the opposite wall. Neither the fireplace wall nor that opposite, which was a partition dividing the house, contained windows. Then he gave his attention to the hearth; this gave him pause.

"What do you make of this fireplace, Parker?" he said, from his position on his knees.

I crossed and bent. "It is as clean as everything else in the room," I said.

"Nothing more?"

"It must have been scrubbed with the same antiseptic thoroughness we've already noticed," I said. "The smell of it is even stronger here. And it doesn't have the look of having had much use. D'Oro apparently goes to no more than minimal trouble to satisfy the appearances."

"Other than scrupulous cleanliness," said Pons. "I put it to you that the romantic setting ought to have more than subdued lights—a fire on the hearth, music, flowers or some pleasant scent—which, I submit, ought not to be antiseptic in essence."

I laughed, I fear, with some cynicism. "For the purpose of seduction, perhaps, Pons. But once an arrangement has been made, I assure you that most ladies are as interested in getting to the heart of the matter as the men."

"Ah, I must defer to your greater experience in these matters, Parker. I am naive enough to have believed that the ladies are invariably partial to the romantic accoutrements."

He came to his feet once more. He stood for a moment examining the bookshelves. Then he began to remove the books from the shelves. "Lend me a hand, Parker," he said. "These shelves at least do not appear to have been cleaned recently."

I followed his lead in piling the books on the floor, seeing as I did so that the shelves behind the books were covered with dust and lint.

"These can hardly be d'Oro's books," I said, looking at some of the titles.

"Capital, Parker! I am always delighted at evidence of your growing inductive skill," answered Pons.

"Surely some of these books must have been the original owner's," I went on. "Medical books and case histories. And they've not been disturbed for years."

"I fancy d'Oro had no need to maintain a library here," said Pons. "Half a dozen books should have served him. These d'Annunzios and a set of Proust are probably d'Oro's; there is some disturbance of the almost uniform dust here."

"And here," I said. "Behind two textbooks used at Guy's—which certainly cannot be of much pertinence any more, considering their date."

Pons came to my side. He stood looking thoughtfully at the



shelving from which I had removed the books. I saw for the first time a neat round hole in the wall behind, as if a knot had fallen from the wood, though the knot was not in evidence. Pons gazed in silence at the dust that had so manifestly been disturbed behind the books from Guy's; then he stepped back from the shelving and surveyed the wall in its entirety, after which he returned to a spot at a point on his side of the chimney approximately uniform with my position.

He removed books from the shelves, and stood with a small sound of satisfaction to contemplate the empty shelf.

Joining him, I saw that here, too, the dust had been disturbed—he still held in his hands the compact little German books he had removed from the shelf—and here, too, another knot had come loose.

"It was folly on the part of the builder to put in knotty pine so close to a chimney," I said, as he bent to examine the shelving there.

"Was it not!" agreed Pons. "Let us return the books to their proper place."

His demeanour baffled me. He said not a word as we restored the books to the shelves. After we had finished, he returned to the enclosed stairway and went up the stairs on his hands and knees, scrutinizing the steps and the adjacent walls with the aid of his glass, making almost inaudible muttering sounds as he went along. Now and then he took from the stairs or the rough plaster walls something invisible to me, inserted it into one of the transparent envelopes he invariably carried, and went on. From the top of the stairs he backed down, still examining every stair.

Once more down the stairs he said, "The stairs have also been carefully cleaned." He shrugged. "But I fancy we are all but finished here. It is growing light outside, and I want to have a look at the exterior of the house."

So saying, he made his way to the front entrance.

Outside, he stood back from the porch and viewed the façade looking out upon the street, where, I saw, the Foreign Office car in which we had come still waited, though the driver appeared to have fallen asleep. Pons stood but a few moments so; then he made his way rapidly around the house, myself at his heels.

On the fireplace wall of the house, he gestured in passing, "The chimney is completely inset. That is somewhat of an architectural

novelty apart from our country houses, I daresay." He paused at the rear entrance and subjected it to a brief examination that had to be cursory in the absence of any but the dawn's light. Then he went on around the house, and, without pausing again, made straight for the car at the kerb.

Pons maintained a thoughtful silence all the way home. At No. 7, he asked our driver to follow us up to our quarters, and that young man, accustomed no doubt to orders, obediently trailed us up the steps to 7B, and stood just over the threshold waiting while Pons scribbled hastily on a sheet of notepaper. He folded this presently, slipped it into an envelope, which he sealed, and handed the envelope to the driver.

"Deliver this to Mr. Pons at once. He must be awakened if he is sleeping — though I fancy he is waiting to hear from us."

"Yes, sir," said the driver, and slipped out of the room.

"There is just time for a spot of tea," said Pons then, rubbing his hands together in that annoyingly self-congratulatory way of his, quite as if he had solved the puzzle of Count d'Oro's disappearance.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

"There are several possible explanations," I ventured cautiously.

"I am glad to hear it," he said. "Pray enlighten me."

"Consider first, the woman," I said.

"A classic consideration," interrupted Pons, nodding and smiling.

"A jealous lover may have preceded her to Orrington Crescent, summoned d'Oro to the door, struck him down, and carried him away."

"Leaving no footprints in the snow. A remarkable accomplishment, indeed!"

I ignored his thrust. "D'Oro may have rushed from the house for some powerful motive unknown to us."

"Powerful, certainly, to take him into the snowy night clad only in bathrobe and slippers."

I abandoned my effort and sought to divert him by pointing to a sealed manila envelope on the table. "Surely that was not here when we left."

"I saw it," said Pons. "It is the dossier on d'Oro, sent over by Bancroft. I fancy we have no need of it."

"Ah, you know where he went?"

"Say, rather, I have a grave suspicion."

More than this he would not say. Instead, he turned to his microscope. There he emptied the transparent envelopes and put what I saw now were strands of some substance on glass slides for examination. There were three such strands, and two of them did not long occupy Pons's attention. He studied the third for some time before he turned from the microscope.

"Well, what have you found?" I asked.

"Fragments of cloth. Two are almost certainly from the kind of cloth commonly found on bathrobes, and the third from a cloth with cleaning oil on it. The first two came from the wall, the last from one of the steps."

"Then d'Oro must have been on the stairs at some time that night."

"He has occupied the house for months," replied Pons, "but he or his bathrobe was certainly present on the stairway at some time during his tenancy."

We were interrupted at the tea and toast our good Mrs. Johnson had brought up to us by a ponderous step on the stair and an equally ponderous knock that followed.

"Inspector Jamison," said Pons, and opened the door to him.

"A fine thing, Pons," he grumbled, walking in. "To be routed from bed at this hour of the morning and sent over here by the Foreign Office!"

"I sent for you," said Pons. "I have decided to reward your invariable courtesy and graciousness by presenting you with what I hope is the solution to a remarkable mystery."

Lowering his portly body into a chair, Jamison settled his bowler on his knee, touched his dark moustache with an index finger, and viewed Pons through eyes narrowed in suspicion. "I will listen," he said in a voice that dripped cautious doubt.

"Though it has been kept strictly in the dark—you know the Foreign Office, Inspector—Count Ercole d'Oro, the Italian consul—has vanished from a house in which he had an assignation."

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"And now the trail's cold, they call on the Yard!" Jamison said bitterly.

"They've not called on you, Inspector. I have."

"Where's the house?"

"In Orrington Crescent."

Jamison's eyes widened with sudden interest. "Not Number 27?"

"Number 27," said Pons.

"So. Another one. That makes the fourth disappearance from those premises. So we are to be troubled by such a matter again!"

"Not for long, I trust," said Pons, as a car scraped to the kerb outside. "But here, if I am not mistaken, is the car from the Foreign Office." He crossed to the windows, and drew aside a curtain. "Are you prepared, Inspector?"

"I was ordered to come armed."

"Good. Let us go down."

He snatched up his deerstalker and ulster as he spoke, and made for the door.

The house in Orrington Crescent was to all appearances exactly as we had left it. The subdued lights were still burning, and so far as it was possible to ascertain at a casual examination, nothing and no one had disturbed the setting.

"Moore, follow us with the materials," said Pons as he left the car.

"Yes, sir."

Glancing behind us as Pons stood unlocking the door to the house, I saw that the driver was coming up the path carrying two wrapped objects; a rubber hose dangled from one of them.

Once inside, Pons moved with dispatch. "Help me clear this shelf, Parker," he asked.

We dumped books unceremoniously on the floor, and in but a few moments we had cleared the chosen shelf—that which we had last cleared. Over his shoulder, Pons said, "Now, Moore, if you please."

The driver now came forward. He had uncovered "the materials" and disclosed two metal canisters, hoses dangling from their nozzles, canisters much like oxygen cylinders, with which I was, of course, familiar. They were marked in large letters: HM War Mag W.

Pons grasped one of them, laid it on the shelf before him, pushed the hose into what I had taken for the open knothole behind the shelf, and turned the nozzle. Then he applied the second canister to the hole on the other side of the chimney and turned that nozzle also. I could hear their contents hissing into open space behind the bookshelves.

Pons took a revolver from the pocket of his ulster and pressed it upon the driver. "If by any miscalculation of mine, a stranger to you should appear in this room, hold him at bay. And do not hesitate to shoot, if you value your life, young man." With a sweep of his arm as he turned, Pons said, "Come," and hurried over to the stairs leading to the floor above.

He bounded up the steps and into the room directly above the sitting-room where Moore waited upon the canisters to empty themselves. He took his stand facing the wall behind the chimney.

"To arms, Inspector," he said crisply.

The three of us stood there in silence, waiting upon events which Pons showed by his confident expression that he expected to take place. Two minutes, three—five—while below us the canisters were emptying into the wall.

Then there rose from within the wall an urgent, scrabbling sound. And suddenly the entire wall behind the chimney began to slide noiselessly downward to recess behind the wall of the storey below, disclosing a passage leading down.

But we had only a moment in which to become aware of this, before a disheveled figure in a white surgeon's gown came struggling up the steps of the passage and stumbled gasping into the empty room.

"Watch your nostrils," said Pons sharply, covering his face with his handkerchief.

"Stand where you are!" shouted Jamison.

But his admonition was needless, for the man who had come up out of the wall collapsed upon the floor, senseless.

"Inspector," said Pons, "let me introduce you to Dr. Roland Borstad, the author, if I am not mistaken, of the Orrington Crescent disappearances—and, I fancy, of others that have gone unrecorded and equally unsolved. Handcuff his hands and feet, Jamison, and drag him to the car as unceremoniously as he dragged his victims up the stairs after drugging them with gas through those same holes in the wall that served to turn the tables on him." He flashed a glance at me. "Not, Parker, with antiseptic, but with some form of anesthetic very probably of his own devising.

"Now, then, that gas we've sent below is a harmless but effective soporific developed by the scientists employed by the War Office. We'll give it time to settle, and then go down to learn what diabolical matters have engaged Borstad all these years. Pray that

we find d'Oro still alive. Moore will give you a hand with Borstad, Jamison."

And in half an hour we descended—to find below the house fully equipped living quarters and an elaborate laboratory, on an operating table in which lay Count Ercole d'Oro, strapped down, unconscious, showing marks of torture, but alive and not in critical condition, despite Borstad's experiments.

On a desk not far away lay a thick manuscript in Borstad's hand—sickeningly annotated, detailing accounts of his experiments, not only on Clyde Lee and Howard Eliot, but on others—the hapless victims Borstad had lured out of the London night into his devilish laboratory, some of those whose names set down by Borstad Jamison recognized as among London's undiscovered missing persons. His manuscript bore the revealing title of *Beyond the Threshold of Pain*.

As we drove back to 7B, with the still unconscious Dr. Borstad slumped in the front seat beside Moore, and d'Oro on his way to the nearest hospital by ambulance, Pons answered Jamison's impatient questions.

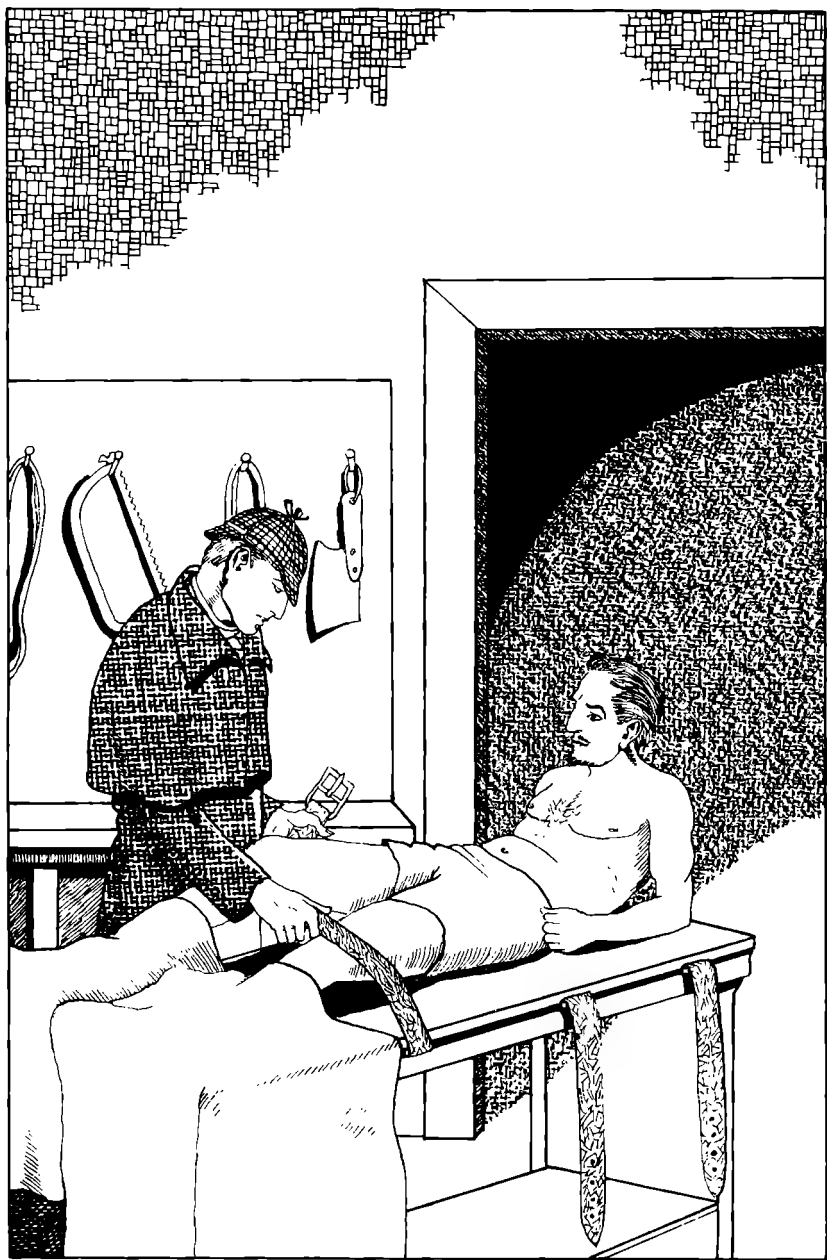
"Quite apart from the fact that there was no manifest motive for d'Oro's disappearance—the Foreign Office's almost paranoid view of espionage as the inevitable explanation of all such events involving any diplomat, even one of the minor status of Count d'Oro, could be discounted at once—the matter devolved basically upon one of two alternatives: d'Oro—and his predecessors, whose bones have long since been buried when Borstad had finished exploring their reactions to pain—disappeared either from the house or within it. I chose to act upon the latter alternative, and made such examination as I could on that assumption.

"Your remembering, Parker, that Borstad's difference with his superiors was rooted in his audacious experiments with the response of the human body to pain suggested a tenable, if horrible motive for Borstad's disappearance, which was obviously carefully planned, as the house he built at No. 27 was designed in its entirety to serve as a trap for his victims, such as he did not take off the streets by night—the derelicts and drunkards to be found in any city during the hours of darkness. 'Nervous breakdown' is one of those ambiguous diagnoses which covers everything from fatigue to madness.

"Once the assumption of the victim's disappearance within the

house was acted upon, certain corroborative evidence was readily found. It was not the Foreign Office that cleaned the house in Orrington Crescent—it was Borstad himself, making sure that every trace of his work was eliminated. Save, of course, the threads from the bathrobe that caught on the plaster when he dragged d'Oro, unconscious from the anesthetic seeping into the room from the openings in the bookcase wall, up the stairs to the cleverly concealed entrance to his sub-surface quarters. You ought to have noticed, Parker, that the difference in the disturbance of the dust on the bookshelves was marked—where books were withdrawn and put back, the marks of withdrawal were in the dust; in the vicinity of the openings the dust was disturbed by air, not by the withdrawal of books."

He shook his head grimly. "The dedicated scientist is constantly in danger of losing his humanity, and forgetting that he too is as integral to nature as the ant or the tree. Borstad's work in progress might better and more pointedly have been titled *Beyond the Threshold of Sanity*."







## *The Adventure of the Devil's Footprints*

AS I CAME into our cosy quarters at 7B Praed Street at midnight one cold January night late in the 1920s, I found Solar Pons just putting on his deerstalker. His Inverness was already on his shoulders. He did not turn at my entrance, quiet as it had been, but spoke at once.

"Ah, Parker," he said with satisfaction, "you are in time to come along on a little excursion into the country past the Chilterns—if you're not too tired."

"I'm never too tired for an adventure—but at this hour!" I protested.

From the mantel to which he had stepped for shag with which to fill his pipe, Pons replied, "I had a wire but two hours past from Detective-Sergeant Athelny Moore of Aylesbury—you may remember him from that little matter of the Sulgrave Squire two years ago—about the disappearance of the vicar who has the living of Tetfield parish. Moore is on his way here to take us to Tetfield, a hamlet not far from Aylesbury. The matter would seem to be urgent, and, since I have the highest regard for Sergeant Moore's judgment, I fancy the problem will be interesting."

There was no need for me to remove my coat, for, within a few moments the sound of a car at the kerb outside was followed by the appearance of Detective-Sergeant Moore himself. He was a young man of medium height, thin of body and of face, with strong blue eyes, an aquiline nose of more than usual length, and a closely cropped moustache over a full mouth.

"I hope you will forgive this late hour, Mr. Pons, but I am utterly at sea," he said. "The Reverend Mr. Ambrose Diall is a man of the most exact habits, well liked by everyone, and just the opposite of the reforming clergyman, with which too many parishes are unhappily afflicted. Besides, he's well along in years, very frail, and not given to any eccentricities, unless his dislike of owls may be so accounted. Yet he walked out of his house sometime during the night, and the marks in the snow indicate that he has vanished without so much as leaving the confines of the rectory and church grounds."

"Let us be on our way, Sergeant," suggested Pons. "If there are marks to be seen in the snow, we shall not want to risk rising temperature tomorrow before we have had opportunity to examine them."

"Now, then," said Pons, when we were ensconced in the car, with Sergeant Moore at the wheel, driving northeast toward Willesden on the way to Aylesbury, "suppose you tell us what has taken place."

"Ah, if only I could, Mr. Pons," cried the sergeant. "But the fact is I cannot begin to do so. Mr. Diall walked out of his house late last night, carrying a shotgun he owned. His housekeeper, an old woman named Jennie Kerruish, said that he had a strange dislike of owls, which disturbed his sleep, and was going to attempt to shoot one. There had been a snowfall late that afternoon and early in the evening, and this has not thawed appreciably since then. Thus it is possible to trace the vicar's movements. He went out of a side door of the rectory, which is an old, rambling building, and moved toward the church, keeping pretty well to the shadows. He had arrived at an old beech-tree and came to a pause at that place. But there his footprints end; they neither turn back nor go off to the side. And yet—and here I come to the most perplexing aspect of the matter—leading away from the vicar's footprints toward the road is a strange pair of hoofprints—that is what they are, Mr. Pons—hoofprints! 'Devil's footprints,' Mrs. Kerruish calls them, and says that for some time past the vicar had seemed to be afraid of the Devil! There has been no trace of Mr. Diall since then."

"No one else occupies the rectory?"

"No one, Mr. Pons."

"So that Mrs. Kerruish's story is without other than circumstantial corroboration?"

"Except for the fact that the vicar's habits were quite well known. The sexton, Silas Elton, says that to his knowledge what Mrs. Kerruish says of the vicar is correct. Mr. Diall was a reclusive man, given to seeing no one except those members of the parish who sought him out or called on him to do the duties of his office. Tetfield is one of those small parishes which are usually without vicars, other than one attached to a larger parish of the neighbourhood. Tetfield was for some time attached to Aylesbury, and the vicarage and church had fallen into disuse when the bishop was persuaded to send the present vicar to the living seven years ago."

"Is there any reason to suspect foul play?" I put in.

Sergeant Moore hesitated a moment before replying. "None."

"I fancy your brief hesitation was not without cause, Sergeant," said Pons.

"Well, Mr. Pons, I don't know that it's worth mentioning. Mrs. Kerruish did think the vicar had been acting troubled for the past week. She gave me a curious kind of letter he had received. But you'll hear as much from her, and you'll see the letter all in good time. I'm sure it's only the imagination of an old woman no longer as sharp as once she might have been."

"How old is Mr. Diall?"

"Sixty-seven."

"I take it there is no evidence of senility."

"None, Mr. Pons."

With this Pons was content to relapse into silence. He traveled the rest of the way without speaking again.

The rectory and its grounds at Tetfield, which, together with the church and adjoining graveyard, were all in one area on the Aylesbury side of the village, and we came to the site of the vicar's disappearance almost upon our entrance into the village. Dawn had not yet arrived, and Sergeant Moore's car, coming to a stop before a low hedge broken by a path, revealed a constable on guard in the glow of its headlamps.

"We've managed to quieten suspicions about the vicar's disappearance," explained Moore. "So we've not had to deal with the curious." He spoke as he led the way by the light of an old-fashioned dark-lantern, which seemed oddly appropriate in this ancient setting of great old yews and gnarled beeches. "Nothing has been disturbed, except for the footprints we've made in the snow alongside the vicar's. Now, here, Mr. Pons, is the side door, and there are the vicar's footprints."

Pons took the dark-lantern from Sergeant Moore and walked along beside the vicar's tracks. The way led across the lawn in the direction of the church, and, ultimately, into the churchyard, where the footprints made a circuitous route among the gravestones. It was apparent even to me that the vicar seemed to be searching for something, and the housekeeper's theory that he had gone out to shoot an owl took on substance, for the footprints suggested as much. They moved this way and that, toward the darker trees, and the stance the vicar took beneath the trees indicated that he had stopped to peer about.

But there, beneath an old beech-tree, the vicar's footprints came to an end. It was plain to be seen that he had walked to this point and paused; thereafter he had not taken a further step, yet there was an unmistakable line of hoofprints leading on from that point, quite as if an eldritch metamorphosis had taken place, and the man who had paused there had become a hoofed creature.

"Those are surely the prints of a two-legged creature with hoofs!" I cried.

"Elementary," said Pons dryly. "Perhaps it was Pan. I have always suspected the concealed compulsions of the clergy."

"Mrs. Kerruish fell to praying at sight of them," said the Sergeant.

"I commend her reaction to you, Parker," said Pons. "At the moment, however, I am somewhat more interested in these other marks. It seems quite clear that the vicar dropped his gun; the print in the snow is adequate proof. You have not mentioned retrieving the shotgun, Sergeant; I take it therefore that someone else did so, either the vicar himself or that enterprising agency which spirited him away."

He shot the rays of the dark-lantern to the tracks leading away from those of the vicar. "What do you make of that slight mark which occurs at intervals alongside the hoofprints, Sergeant?"

I looked to where Pons had directed the light and saw at intervals a light brushing in the snow—scarcely enough to more than disturb the evenness of the surface—almost as if a lopsided tail had dragged there!

"I've been unable to come to any tenable conclusion about it, Mr. Pons."

"Let me commend it to your attention, Sergeant. Now, then, let us just see what happens to these curious prints. Devil's footprints they are indeed, Sergeant; Mrs. Kerruish may be more right than she knows, even if her acquaintance with devils is limited to that traditional hoofed figure of our Christian belief."

He walked on.

The hoofprints led outward from the graveyard in a straight line toward the road. But they did not reach there, for just as abruptly as the vicar's footprints had come to a stop, so did these. The road was still twenty feet away. Pons dropped to his knees and scrutinized the last of the prints with the greatest care. Then he got up, brushing the snow from his knees, and looked around, flashing the dark-lantern on all sides and up into the trees. From this cursory

examination, he went on to another; bidding us stay where we were, he began to walk in ever widening arcs from one side to another of the line of prints, until he arrived at the road; there he went up and down, looking vainly for any sign that either the vicar's footprints or the hoofprints had been renewed.

Coming back, he retreated along the line of hoofprints to the last prints of the vicar; there he dropped to his knees once more and subjected both sets of prints to the most intense examination before he stood up again.

"I daresay you have already determined that the hoofed being of this little drama was not carrying anything of any great weight from this spot, Sergeant," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"And that the weight of the two—the vicar and the other—was not equal?"

"I felt we had reason to believe so."

"Capital, Sergeant! Granted, then, that two people walked here, both seemingly inexplicably with incompleated trace. Now, I think you will have noticed that the author of the hoofprints could have made his way to the road with ease by swinging from one branch to another of the low-limbed trees between the places where the hoofprints end and the road begins. That is almost certainly the method of egress from the churchyard; a close scrutiny of the final set of hoofprints indicates that the creature went up. The vicar's footprints, however, do not give such a clear indication. Here he stood—his prints are not clear; he shifted from one foot to the other; he moved in his tracks. Yet, there is but one direction in which he could have gone."

So saying, Pons flashed the light of the dark-lantern up into the ancient beech-tree which loomed overhead.

"Mr. Pons, there's nothing in those branches," said the Sergeant.

The light traveled through the tree to the roof of the church.

"I submit that anyone in the tree might have ready access to the church," said Pons.

"It could be done, Mr. Pons," said Sergeant Moore cautiously.

"Come along and give me a hand, Sergeant. I'm going up into the beech."

Pons climbed up into the tree. He had returned the Sergeant's dark-lantern in favour of a smaller pocket-torch of his own, and from time to time its light was visible to us below. He climbed well up into the tree, examining bole and limbs, and even ventured out

along one sturdy old limb toward the church roof on the far side before he came back down.

"The weather, I think you said, was cold yesterday, Sergeant?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. There was no thaw."

"And the forecast for yesterday's weather?"

"That was a mistake, Mr. Pons. Warmer weather was predicted; it didn't come."

Pons chuckled. "If I am not mistaken, this little scene was played to the weather."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, Mr. Pons."

"No matter. I submit that if the vicar's footprints had not been eliminated by the expected thaw, the hoofprints leading outward would prove equally mystifying, even as they have done. As it is, we are entertained by both sets of prints—the one scarcely meant to be seen, the other otherwise designed. Now, then, it lacks but an hour of dawn. If I may, I should like to take a look into the church. Is the key available?"

"I have all Mr. Diall's keys, Mr. Pons," said Sergeant Moore. "Mrs. Kerruish lives apart from the rectory, just across the way, and recognized that we should have access. But the church is usually kept unlocked."

Pons led the way, carefully skirting the line of mysterious footprints. He went through the graveyard to the church, which immediately adjoined it. It was an attractive building of stone, several centuries old. Pons opened the door upon the gloomy interior. In the light of the dark-lantern, the church proved to be singularly barren of any but the traditional Anglican trappings; here there was no touch of the High Church, but only an austerity that harked back to the Reformation.

Without thought of us, Pons moved rapidly about the church, paying particular attention to the south wall and the altar. But he evidently did not find what he sought, if indeed he sought anything, for he roved restlessly about until the light of the lantern fixed upon a long trap-door just before the vestry. He went directly to this and tugged at it. As it came up, it revealed well-worn steps leading down into the church crypt. Without hesitation, Pons pushed forward.

The crypt was almost as devoid of ornament and fixture as the church. The wall directly under the altar was a catacomb; it consisted of three rows of burial niches. Along the north wall stood the

paraphernalia of church bazaars and picnics—wooden tables, benches, and the like—together with certain tools, which were certainly those most often used by the sexton in his role as gravedigger. The west and south walls were clear of impedimenta.

Pons's primary attention was for the burial niches. He passed rapidly from one to another, subjecting each to the most intense scrutiny. Suddenly a muffled exclamation escaped him, as he paused before one of them. He held the light of the dark-lantern on it, and with his free hand touched its surface, where minute scratches were visible; these were of comparatively recent origin, though the date on the receptacle was 1780.

"Does this not bear marks of having been tampered with, as if it had been recently opened, Sergeant?"

"Indeed it does, Mr. Pons. Though I couldn't imagine who might have opened it. These niches hold the mortal remains of former vicars who have had the living and had no other place of burial. This crypt has not been used for burials for decades, however."

"Hold the lantern, Parker."

While I held the light steady, Pons worked at the niche. In but a few moments he had it open, disclosing a stone coffin beyond. This in turn he pulled out. Its cover had fallen inward. Pons took the light and shone it into the coffin. There lay exposed not the charnel remains one might have expected, but a black attaché case of appreciable size.

"Let us just look inside that case, Sergeant."

Sergeant Moore took the case from its hiding place. "It's locked, sir."

"Break the lock."

Sergeant Moore did so. As the case fell open, a sharp gasp escaped him. In the light of the dark-lantern lay a small fortune in gold and bank-notes!

"The Reverend Mr. Diall's offertories seem to have been extraordinarily good," observed Pons dryly.

"Mr. Pons—you expected this?" asked Sergeant Moore.

"I fear I cannot say so. I am looking for something more sinister. What better place than these burial niches? This diversion, however, throws a little different light on the matter. Let us impound the contents of the case, and return the case itself to its place of concealment. You and Parker should be able to pocket this little cache."

Pons waited until we had emptied the attaché case. Then he



swung away from the burial niches to pass slowly along the south wall of the crypt, flashing the light on wall and floor until he came to a place approximately halfway along the wall. There he stopped.

"Ah, here we are!" he cried. "Fresh earth, missed by the broom where the wall joins the floor. And here—as you can see—the stones have recently been moved. Lend a hand, Sergeant. Let us see what lies behind them."

I helped the Sergeant work out the stones. Slowly, a kind of tunnel came into sight. It was half filled with earth, some of which slid forward into the crypt when the stones were being taken away.

"There's a shovel over along that wall," said Sergeant Moore, inclining his head toward the north. "I saw it when we came down."

"We'll not need it at the moment," said Pons, who was shining the light into the opening we had disclosed. "You can see a pair of shoes, soles facing us. Clerical shoes, unless I am in error. The late Mr. Diall is still in them. It was manifest that he must be here somewhere, for there was only one direction he could go from the place where he vanished. That was up. He had not been carried away. He was not in the tree. Therefore he went up through the tree, caught by a noosed rope swung over a limb so that he could easily be drawn up out of his tracks. And from the tree he went over to the church roof, down the wall of the building, and in, through a door or a window, and was carried to his grave here, after which his murderer went back the way he had come and, once ready to leave the beech-tree, donned those fanciful hoofs and carried on from the vicar's tracks, trailing his rope sufficiently to leave but a brushing in the snow at intervals—like a Satanic tail."

"What a cunning scheme!" exclaimed the Sergeant. "Who could have wanted to harm so inoffensive a man as Mr. Diall?"

"That remains to be discovered. Now, then, it lacks but little time before dawn. How long do you suppose we shall have to wait on Mrs. Kerruish?"

"No time at all, Mr. Pons. The good woman proposes to present herself at any hour for your inquiry."

"Very well. For the moment, we can do nothing for Mr. Diall. Let us just close up that opening once more and repair to the rectory."

Contrary to my expectations, the house was furnished almost to the point of opulence. Somehow, I had conceived of the vicar as a dry-as-dust sort of man, content to vegetate in so quiet a spot, where his living could hardly have been enough to keep him in more than the most niggardly circumstances, as so many vicars of

the Church of England are unhappily kept. The study gave evidence of a very large library, the most recent model of the wireless, and well-stocked cocktail cabinet.

"This room is just as the vicar left it," said the Sergeant. "Mrs. Kerruish has not disturbed anything."

"And Mrs. Kerruish?"

"She lives nearby. But here she is now."

The sound of footsteps at the back of the house was followed by the opening and closing of a door. A short, heavy, white-haired woman, who was not without a certain kinship to a Whistler portrait, came to the threshold of the room. She had mild blue eyes, a much-lined face, and an uncertain mouth; her hair straggled down the sides of her face, giving evidence of her haste.

"I see the lights go on, and I guessed the gentlemen from London had come, Sergeant Moore," she said. "So I got up and dressed and came over."

"And just in good time too, Mrs. Kerruish," said the Sergeant. "This is Mr. Solar Pons. I wish you'd tell him just what you told me."

"That I will," she replied as she came into the study and sat down.

"It all started about a week before the good man walked out of this house and never came back, God save him," she began. "Up to that time he'd been his same old self, jolly as a parson ought to be. 'Good-morning, Mrs. Kerruish,' he'd say to me every morning he came down. 'And how's my Cornish lass this morning?' A good man, through and through, and I'm an old woman who's seen a parcel of men in my time. After breakfast he'd go into this room and do his work—writing letters and such, though, truth to tell, it was precious few letters he ever wrote—once in a while his report to the bishop, and a subscription to a magazine—scarcely any more.

"You can see by looking about he got a good many papers. *The Times*, *The Observer*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, and he liked to read 'em. Well, sir, that morning he'd just settled down to read the paper, when he got up quick-like, muttering to himself, and he came back to the kitchen where I was at work, and wanted to know had I seen the sexton about? I said no, I hadn't; so he went and got his hat and set out to walk over to where Silas lives—that's just on the other side of the church. After a while he came back, and he was mighty quiet, didn't have hardly a word for me, but acted like he was bothered about something. He went to the papers again and he looked 'em all through from first sheet to last, and then he

turned on the wireless and listened to the news. All the rest of that day he did scarcely anything else; there was a report due the bishop, too, but it wasn't for two days after that he got around to making that out.

"Next day it was he began to watch the post most anxiously. Before that time the post never mattered very much to him; sometimes he never even looked at it for a day or two. But this past week, he could hardly wait to get it. Then one day, just three days ago it was, he got a letter from London. I heard him give a sort of groan, and I hurried to the study just as he crumpled up a letter and threw it into his wastepaper-basket. 'Is there anything wrong?' I asked him, but he says only, 'I'm perfectly all right, Mrs. Kerruish,' like I was somebody he met casual in the street. But I begun to notice his colour was off, and he didn't hardly eat anything, and he seemed to be watching and listening and waiting for something, and every time he heard an owl, he'd take his gun and go out after it. Many an owl he's shot here, Mr. Pons; he couldn't abide 'em, nor can I—nasty, creepy things, and they do say as when they call near a sick person that one will die. I've known it to happen.

"Well, sir, last night I was working late, ironing his things, when I heard that owl call—a brown owl, I think it was, that sad, wailing kind of call. And he heard it, too. He came out to the kitchen for his gun, looking sort of wild, and went by me without a word, out by the side door. I was just about done, I had about quarter of an hour to do, and I did it and went home. He wasn't back when I left, but there was nothing strange to that. But this past morning, when I came in I see he hadn't come home, and when I went out lookin' for him, I see those Devil's footprints, and I went right over and reported, quiet-like, that the vicar hadn't come home."

For a few moments after she had finished her story, Pons sat in thoughtful silence, his eyes closed, his lean, ascetic face in repose, the index finger and thumb of his right hand stroking the lobe of his ear, in that gesture so typical of him. Presently his eyes flashed open; he looked intently at Mrs. Kerruish.

"You saw the vicar throw a letter into the wastepaper-basket, Mrs. Kerruish. Did you save the letter?"

"No, Mr. Pons. But I hadn't burned it when the Sergeant asked. I empty the wastepaper-basket into a larger basket and burn it when that's full. I got the letter out for Sergeant Moore." Here she looked inquiringly at the Sergeant, who nodded at her and came forward with the letter in question, smoothed out and unfolded so that Pons might read the curious message at a glance.

*I will come for you soon. Otus.*

There was no superscription, nor was there any date. The envelope, which Sergeant Moore now put down beside it, bore a date four days before; it had been posted in Notting Hill. Pons glanced at it and turned for the time being from both letter and envelope.

"The vicar had never before shown any sign of being troubled, Mrs. Kerruish?"

"None, sir. He was as cheerful as a lark."

"And would you say, now, if it devolved upon you to say so, was he ill or otherwise troubled?"

"Oh, he wasn't ill, Mr. Pons. He had something on his mind, and it troubled him, deep."

"Since you did not burn the wastepaper, perhaps you have not disposed of Mr. Diall's daily papers, either, Mrs. Kerruish?"

"No, sir, I have not. All the papers for the last week or so are stacked right up alongside the study table."

Pons's glance flickered to the papers she pointed out, and returned to her. "I daresay the sexton ought to have risen by this time. It is dawn."

"He said to fetch him, Mr. Pons."

"Very well. That is all, Mrs. Kerruish, thank you."

"Oh, I do hope you'll be able to find him, Mr. Pons. That poor man! Him being so frail and all, and the nights so chill!"

The moment we were left alone—Sergeant Moore having gone off to fetch Silas Elton, and Mrs. Kerruish having returned to her cottage—Pons turned to the newspapers neatly stacked beside the study table.

"Let us see—a week ago. That would be last Tuesday week. It is now Wednesday morning. Ah, here we are. All three are together. If you'll run through the columns of *The Times* and *The Observer* for some possibly relevant item, I shall do the same with the *Daily Telegraph*. Some item must have given Mr. Diall quite a shock."

"I hardly know what to look for," I protested.

"Nor I, at the moment. However, since the subject is to all appearances a retiring country clergyman, it ought not to be too difficult to discover what might have affected him. It might be notice of a financial loss. . . ."

"It is elementary that that is not likely," I interrupted.

"Ah, why do you say so, Parker?"

"Because in that case you would have taken *The Times* to look through the financial columns yourself."

"Capital, Parker!" exclaimed Pons with a deep chuckle.

"Something of the ratiocinative process seems to be rubbing off on you."

We had hardly commenced our labours when Sergeant Moore came with the sexton.

Silas Elton was a tall, gangling fellow of about sixty years. He had the appearance of a rough countryman, and his clothes spoke for his menial occupation. He had huge, rough hands, which now held his cap. That he had not long since risen from sleep was evident in his red eyes and in his tousled hair, which had not been combed.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Pons?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. Elton. You had opportunity to observe Mr. Diall during the past week?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he seem out of sorts to you?"

"Mr. Pons, he was deadly scared of something."

"Ah, we make progress. Did he let drop any hint of what he feared?"

"No, sir."

"Now, Mr. Elton, we understand that approximately a week ago, when the change in the vicar came about, he left the house suddenly and went over to see you. What about?"

"He wanted new and stronger locks put on the rectory doors."

"Did you put them on?"

"Not yet, sir. The locks are all good ones, but I could see 'twas no use arguing with him. He'd made up his mind, and he was mortal scared."

"Mr. Elton, how long have you known Mr. Diall?"

The sexton was taken aback by the question, but he rallied quickly. "Why, almost as long as he's been here, sir. Ever since I came to the village."

"On the night of the vicar's disappearance, did you hear anything out of the ordinary?"

"No, sir."

"The cry of an owl, for instance?"

The sexton smiled apologetically. "Wouldn't think to mention that, Mr. Pons. There's always plenty of brown owls about."

"Then you did hear the cry of an owl?" pressed Pons.

"I did, yes. And I knew he'd be setting out after it. He was death to owls, sir, 'struth. And he did go. Cook showed me his tracks next morning—and them others." He shuddered, and his face blanched

a little. "Like as if the devil took him." He shook his head wonderingly.

"Could you say, was it an owl that called—or a man imitating an owl?"

The sexton looked startled, as if this idea had never occurred to him. "Why, sir, I thought. . . . But it might have been a man. It's not hard to mock the brown owl."

"So that, if someone had taken it into his head to draw the vicar out, such an imitation would have achieved that end?"

"Yes, sir, I expect it would."

"Thank you, Mr. Elton. We may wish to speak to you again."

"Whenever you need me, sir."

When the three of us were alone again, Pons turned to the letter Sergeant Moore had passed to him.

"You had some opportunity to study this, Sergeant. Did anything about it strike you?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The writing seemed to be disguised. It seemed laboured—as if whoever had written it had had a hard time getting his letters right."

"Yet Mr. Dially, to judge from his reaction, had not the slightest doubt as to the sender's identity. I commend that fact to your attention, Sergeant. Now, then, just have a look at this paragraph in the *Daily Telegraph*."

He laid it on the table before us as he spoke.

It was a curiously inappropriate bit of news.

### MUNSON ROBBER RELEASED

Leonard Wimberly, 67, was released from Dartmoor to-day, after serving fifteen years for the robbery of Munson's, Ltd., a Midlands bank. He was the leader of the Owl Gang, which was responsible for many crimes of robbery and burglary fifteen to twenty years ago. Two confederates, Alfred Storer and Willie Compton, who gave evidence for the Crown, served reduced sentences of five years each. The stolen money from Munson's was never recovered, Storer swearing that Wimberly alone knew where it was cached, and Wimberly stating on oath that Storer had concealed the money.

Sergeant Moore shook his head in perplexity.

"You cannot mean that this is the paragraph which so agitated the vicar?" I cried.

"I submit it is," said Pons, with maddening superiority. "Let us look again at the letter. 'I will come for you soon.' It is signed 'Otus.' Is that not a most curiously suggestive name, Parker?"

"Very probably a variation of Otis or Oates, neither of which is uncommon."

"But Otus, I submit, *is* uncommon. Surely it is more than a coincidence that it is part of the name given to the closest American counterpart of our common tawny or brown owl—the screech owl, the Latin name of which is *Otus asio*—the same name applied in part to our own somewhat rarer Scops owl—*Otus scops*."

"That is as far-fetched a connection as I've ever heard you make," I retorted.

"An appropriate pen-name for the leader of the Owl Gang, is it not? They took their name, incidentally, from the habitual use of owl calls as signals."

"Oh, come, Pons," I cried, "You are joking!"

"On the contrary, I was never more serious. I submit that it is more than coincidence that we should come upon owls so frequently in this little matter without a manifest connection among them. Mr. Diall was well known to his housekeeper and his sexton for his aversion to owls, so much of an aversion, indeed, that the mere cry of one sent him for his gun and compelled him to kill the inoffensive bird. Yet he is otherwise pictured as a gentle, retiring, jolly fellow. Is this picture not somewhat inconsistent?"

"It is entirely within the limits of possibility," I protested.

"Oh, entirely," agreed Pons amiably. "But when it is coupled with the attendant factors, its probability grows increasingly remoter."

Sergeant Moore moved uneasily, cleared his throat, and said cautiously, "As I understand you, Mr. Pons, you are suggesting that Wimberly, as the head of the Owl Gang, wrote to Mr. Diall immediately on his release and sent him what could be construed as a threat. Can you possibly mean that the money we found in the crypt is the haul from Munson's?"

"My confidence in you is not misplaced, Sergeant," said Pons, smiling. "Appearances are often deceptive. Mr. Diall has lived such an exemplary life in Tetfield that no one tends to think of what his life might have been like before his tenure here. He came to Tetfield seven years ago. He was released from prison ten years ago.

He had three years to alter his identity and to prepare for the ministry, after which he had to find some remote parish where he could settle down to enjoy the harvest of the Munson robbery. I submit that our Mr. Dially was formerly better known as Alfred Storer. Since Alfred turned King's evidence at the trial, it was far more probable that the authorities would believe him against Wimberly when each claimed the other had hidden the robbery proceeds, though it was Wimberly who told the truth. Small wonder that Mr. Dially could hardly bear the sound of an owl's cry—the gang's one-time signal; he was haunted by his betrayal of Wimberly and the fear of what he might expect if ever Wimberly discovered his whereabouts. Now, then, has any stranger come to Tetfield within the past few days?"

"Mr. Pons, I don't know. I can have inquiry made."

"You may be sure that once Wimberly has set out to find the money, he will not be far away from it. For the moment, however, let us not forget that we have a body to dispose of. Would it not be best to let the sexton know that we have found the vicar?"

"He will take it hard."

"Fetch him, Sergeant. I have one or two questions to ask him before he learns of our discovery."

"All crime is little short of idiotic," observed Pons, after Sergeant Moore had gone for Silas Elton, "and this one is particularly so. Storer would very probably have surrendered his share without protest in exchange for his life; he had had ten good years of it."

"Wimberly must be an exceptionally strong man to have hoisted Storer aloft," I said.

"The vicar was a small, frail man, remember. But here is the Sergeant with Mr. Elton. Come in, come in, Mr. Elton. I fear we have bad news for you."

The sexton came in before Sergeant Moore. He had combed his hair and looked considerably more presentable.

"You've had trace of the vicar, sir?"

"Indeed we have, Mr. Elton. We found him in the wall of the church crypt—half-dead, but fortunately he'll be able to tell us soon who tried to murder him. We have him upstairs in bed."

Hardly had Pons spoken, when the most extraordinary change came over the sexton. His jaw dropped, his eyes widened, he began to tremble. Then, with a sound that was half-cry, half-sob, he turned. Had it not been for Pons, he would have leaped from the kitchen. With a bound, Pons was out of his chair and on top of



him, his long powerful arms around Silas Elton's neck, bearing him to the floor. For a moment Sergeant Moore was too stunned to act; then he, too, flung himself upon the sexton to secure him. Once the handcuffs were on Elton, Pons stood up.

"Willie Compton, alias Silas Elton—at your service. I congratulate you, Sergeant Moore. Do not hesitate to charge him with the murder of Mr. Diall, once Alfred Storer."

"A pathetic example of thieves falling out," said Pons, as he sat looking from the window of our compartment at the austere landscape flashing past on our way to London later that day. "A crime that was as unnecessary as it was impulsive. It had probably not occurred to Compton until the day Storer came over to announce his discovery in the *Daily Telegraph*. That frightened Compton, as well, and, as most guilty men do, he wanted to take flight. Storer did not; he was satisfied with his lot, and not as frightened as Compton—had he been, he would hardly have gone out to challenge what might have been a signal to him on that fatal night. Besides, Storer was very probably certain that Wimberly would have a difficult time to find him. Compton was not content to wait and find out.

"The writing on the warning note was disguised because Storer might very well have recognized Compton's hand, but might be too frightened, as it turned out, to recognize that the script was in a disguised hand. To have the letter sent from London and afford the police a perfect clue pointing straight to Wimberly cost Compton little effort, far less than those ridiculous hoofprints in the snow. On the chosen night, he need only climb into the beech-tree—from the church—cry out like an owl, and be confident that Storer would come out for him. You may be sure he had rehearsed his little plan, but the snow added a complication which he contrived to lend an aspect which might appear highly sinister to the superstitious. Devil's footprints, indeed! He might more easily have simply disappeared with Storer's cache, since he had undoubtedly learned where the money was hidden in the rectory, and took the first opportunity—before or after the murder—to remove it to the crypt, from which he could take it in his own good time, whenever he was ready to leave Tetfield, once the investigation had died down.

"His guilt was obvious from the moment I learned that he had come to the village at about the same time as the vicar. There had clearly been an understanding between Compton and Storer.

Fundamentally, however, Compton's crime violated the law of probability. It was hardly probable that Wimberly would either have warned of his coming or announced his arrival. It was improbable that he could so quickly learn the whereabouts of the other members of the Owl Gang, or, having known, would have discovered so rapidly the details of the setting insofar as they were necessary to exacting that vengeance Compton sought to persuade us to believe had been accomplished. Only Compton was equipped with this knowledge. Finally, it was highly unlikely that Wimberly would be released from prison, with the Munson robbery proceeds still missing, without being followed and watched.

"Compton and Storer were living in a quiet paradise all their own. Poor Compton! The guilty flee when no man pursueth. The real Devil's footprints were invisible!"

## *The Adventure of the Sussex Archers*

ON A BALMY summer evening late in the 1920s I returned to our quarters at No. 7B Praed Street to find my friend Solar Pons slouched in his armchair deep in contemplation of an unfolded piece of ruled paper.

"Ah, Parker," he said, without looking up, "you are just in time for what promises to be a diversion to brighten a few summer days."

So saying, he handed to me the paper he had been studying.

It appeared to be cheap notepaper, of a kind readily obtainable in any stationer's shop. On it had been pasted, in letters cut from a newspaper:

### PREPARE FOR YOUR PUNISHMENT!

In addition, there had been pasted to the paper a printed drawing of an arrow.

My alarm must have betrayed itself in my face, for Pons smiled and said, "No, no, Parker—it was not intended for me. It was directed to Joshua Colvin of Lurgashall, Sussex, and reached me by messenger from Claridge's late this afternoon. This letter came with it."

He fished the missive out of the pocket of his lilac dressing-gown and gave it to me.

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"If it is convenient for you, I hope to call on you at eight this evening in regard to a problem about which my father will do nothing in spite of the fact that one such warning has already been followed by death. I enclose the warning he has received. Since I believe you are fully aware of current crimes and mysteries in England, may I call your attention to the death of Andrew Jefferds of Petworth, ten days ago? Should it be inconvenient for me to call, a wire to me at Claridge's will put me off. I am, respectfully, yours.

"HEWITT COLVIN."

"I see by the newspapers beside your chair that you've looked up the death of Jefferds," I said.

"The development of your deductive processes always gives me pleasure," said Pons. "Indeed I have. I found it a delightful little puzzle. Jefferds, a man with no known enemies—we read nothing of those unknown—was done to death at twilight ten days ago in his garden at the edge of the village by means of an arrow in his back. The police are baffled, but the investigation is continuing."

"Surely that is an unusual weapon," I cried.

"Is it not! But a profoundly significant one, for it occurs also on the warning, and would then no doubt have some significance for Mr. Colvin which so far escapes us." He raised his head briefly and listened. "But that is a motor slowing outside, and I suspect it is our client. We need speculate no more until we hear his story."

In a few moments Mrs. Johnson showed Hewitt Colvin into our quarters. He was a man in his thirties, with a ruddy face and keen grey eyes. He wore a moustache and side-whiskers, and looked the picture of the country squire in his tweed suit.

"Mr. Pons," he said without preamble, "I hope you will forgive the abruptness of my letter. I appreciate your willingness to listen to my problem, which, believe me, sir, is urgent. Six men have received a copy of the warning I dispatched to you earlier—one is already dead."

"Ah," said Pons, "the significance of the arrow! The warnings were identical?" He waved our client to a seat, but Colvin was too agitated to take it, for he strode back and forth.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"What have these six men in common?"

"All belonged to the Sussex Archers."

"Active?"

"No, sir. That is the background of my problem. They have been disbanded ever since the death of Henry Pope twenty years ago. Pope was the seventh member of the Archers. He died, Mr. Pons, like Mr. Jefferds—with an arrow in his back, an arrow belonging to the Sussex Archers. The inquest brought about a verdict of death by accident, and I have always understood that this was a true verdict. I am no longer so certain."

"Let us begin at the beginning, Mr. Colvin," suggested Pons.

"It may be that is the beginning, Mr. Pons—back in 1907. As for now, well, sir, I suppose it begins with the return of Trevor Pope—

brother of that Henry Pope who died twenty years ago. He had been in Canada, came back to England, opened the old house near Lurgashall, and went into a reclusive existence there.

"I shall not forget my first sight of him! The country around Blackdown is, as you may know, great walking country. I was out one evening in the dusk when I heard someone running toward me. I made for some undergrowth and had just effected my concealment when there burst out of the woods across a little opening from where I was hidden a short, dark, burly man surrounded by six great mastiffs, all running in absolute silence save for the sound of his footfalls. He looked, sir, inconceivably menacing!

"That was in May. Two weeks later I saw him again. This time I did not hear him; he burst suddenly upon me, pedaling furiously on a bicycle, with his mastiffs running alongside—three on each side of him, and though he saw me clearly he said not a word—simply went past as fast as he could. Nor did the dogs bark. Mr. Pons, it was uncanny. In the interval I had learned his identity, but at the time it meant nothing to me—I was but twelve when Henry Pope died, and was away at school at the time.

"Then, late in June, the messages arrived."

"To all six members of the onetime Sussex Archers?" interrupted Pons.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Of course, I didn't know this at the time. It has come out only since Jefferds's death. Father made inquiry."

"All six of the Archers still live in the vicinity of Lurgashall? Petworth, I believe, is but three miles or so away."

"All but one. George Trewethen moved to Arundel ten years ago."

"What was your father's response to the warning?"

"He dismissed it as the work of a crank."

"Until Jefferds's death?"

"Until then, yes, Mr. Pons. Then he wrote or telephoned to the other members and learned for the first time that all of them had received identical warnings. It alarmed him for a bit, but not for long. He's very obstinate. When he goes out now he carries his gun—but a gun's small defence against an arrow in the back; so my brother and I take turns following him and keeping him in sight whenever he goes out."

"You are here with his consent?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He would not be averse to a private inquiry, but seems determined to keep the police out of it."

"But are the police not already in it?" asked Pons. "They will surely have discovered the warning Jefferds received."

"Mr. Pons, no one knows of it except my father. He would not have known, had Mr. Jefferds not come to visit him some time ago and mentioned having received and destroying it. So the police do not know."

"I see," said Pons thoughtfully.

"Mr. Pons, I am driving back to our home on the lower slopes of Blackdown tomorrow morning. Dare I hope that you and Dr. Parker will accompany me?"

"What precisely do you expect us to do, Mr. Colvin?"

"I hope, frankly, that you will devise some way in which to trap Trevor Pope before an attempt is made on my father's life."

"That will surely not be readily accomplished, Mr. Colvin. Six mastiffs, I think you said. And the man either runs or pedals as fast as possible." Pons flashed a glance at me. "What do you say, Parker?"

"Let us go by all means. I am curious to see this fellow and his dogs."

"Thank heaven, Mr. Pons! It is little more than an hour from London. I will call for you tomorrow morning at—but you name the hour, Mr. Pons."

"Seven o'clock, Mr. Colvin. We are early risers."

"I will be here. Good-night, gentlemen."

After our client's departure, Pons sat for a few moments staring thoughtfully into the dark fireplace. Presently he turned in my direction and asked, "What do you make of it, Parker?"

"Well, it's plain as a pikestaff that Colvin senior doesn't want the police nosing about that twenty-year-old accident," I said. "And that suggests it may have been more than an accident. From that conclusion it is but a step to the theory that Mr. Trevor Pope has come back from Canada at last to avenge the murder of his brother."

"Capitall" cried Pons. "That is surely exemplary deduction, Parker. I am troubled by only one or two little aspects of the matter which no doubt you will be able to clear up when the time comes. We have as yet no evidence to connect Trevor Pope with the warning letters."

"It is surely not just coincidence that Pope's appearance in the neighbourhood is followed by the arrival of warning letters," I cried. "Their very wording points to him!"

"Does it not!" agreed Pons. "The intended victims are not told to prepare for death, but for 'punishment.' That is surely ambiguous! 'Punishment' for what?"

"Why, for the murder of Henry Pope, what else?"

"The coroner's inquest determined that Henry Pope came to an accidental death."

"Inquest verdicts are not infallible conclusions, Pons; none knows this better than you."

"True, true," murmured Pons. "Yet I find this disturbingly simple, and I incline a little to distrust of the obvious."

"It all hangs together," I protested. "What other significance could the printed arrow on the warnings have but a reminder of the Sussex Archers—and, specifically, of the occasion of their disbanding?"

"I think the reference cannot be disputed," agreed Pons. "What troubles me is simply this—why warn these gentlemen at all?"

"It is elementary psychology that avengers have a pathological wish to let their victims know *why* they are being punished. These warnings, with their printed arrows, seem to have achieved their purpose, now that the first one of the surviving six members of the Sussex Archers has been murdered."

"They do, indeed—but not yet to the extent of sending any one of them for the police. What coy reluctance to act!"

"If any proof were needed that Henry Pope's death was not all it seems, that is certainly it."

"Is it? I wonder. These waters, I fear, are darker than we may at this moment believe. We shall see. Just let me have that Sussex Guide not far beyond your elbow, will you? There's a good fellow!"

Thereafter Pons retreated for the remainder of the evening behind the book I handed to him.

An hour or so after our client stopped for us next morning, we were driving through the quaint Wealden village which is Lurgashall—a small, quiet hamlet, composed of a green surrounded by several picturesque cottages—and climbing the height of Blackdown, the highest hill in Sussex. Not far up the slope stood our client's home, a rambling house of stone set behind stone gate piers and a yew hedge, with outbuildings down the slope from it at one side. Its tall casement windows were curtained at this hour, and, indeed, the house and grounds were almost lost in the surrounding woods.

Our client had wired his father of our impending arrival; as a result, Joshua Colvin awaited us in the breakfast room. He was a sturdy, middle-aged man wearing a fierce, straggly moustache, and a dogged look in his dark blue eyes.

He acknowledged his son's introductions in a gruff, self-confident manner. "You'll join me at breakfast, Mr. Pons—Dr. Parker?" he asked.

"A cup of tea, sir," said Pons. "We have breakfasted. Besides, I like to keep my mind clear for these little problems."

Colvin favoured him with an even, measuring glance. "Sit down, gentlemen," he said. "I take coffee and brandy for breakfast—always have done, in addition to toast, jam, and a bit of bacon. You'll not mind my eating? I waited on your coming."

"By no means, Mr. Colvin."

We sat at the breakfast-table, and would have been readily at ease had it not been for an almost immediate interruption. A young man, obviously just out of bed, burst into the room, his sensitive face flushed and upset.

"Father—I saw Pearson about again last night. . . ." he said, and, catching sight of us, stopped. "I beg your pardon."

"Come in, come in—you're late again," said Colvin. Turning to us, he added, "My son, Alasdair—Mr. Solar Pons, Dr. Parker. Now, then—Pearson. You're quite sure?"

"Certain, sir. Skulking outside the gates. I got in about midnight."

"Pearson," put in our client, "is a beater my father discharged over two months ago. Been hanging around ever since."

"Man's dotty," said Colvin senior, snorting. "Ought to be off getting himself another place."

"May I ask why he was discharged?" inquired Pons.

"He was party to a poaching ring," said Colvin shortly. "Sort of thing I won't tolerate."

Alasdair Colvin, meanwhile, had swallowed only a cup of coffee. Then he got to his feet again, made his excuses, and left the room.

"The boy has an editorial position of some kind," growled Colvin. "Softening job. Lets him sleep late. These people in publishing are like bankers—they get to the office any time between ten and twelve. Disgraceful, I call it."

Our host had now devoured three rashers of bacon, a slice of toast covered with marmalade, and two cups of coffee in the time it took Pons to drink half a cup of tea. I saw that Pons's eyes not only



were upon the senior Colvin, but also were flickering about the gracious room, taking in its appointments.

Joshua Colvin pushed back from the table, arms akimbo, hands gripping the arms of the Windsor-chair in which he sat.

"Well, sir," he said to Pons, "now that you're here at my son's invitation, we may as well get on with it."

"Tell me something about the Sussex Archers, Mr. Colvin," said Pons quietly.

"Little to tell, sir. Organized 1901. Disbanded 1907. Accidental killing of one of our number, Henry Pope. Never had more than seven members. Pope, Jefferds, myself. George Trewethen, Abel Howard, Will Ockley, and David Wise. That's the lot of us. All devoted to archery. We got together to practise archery. That's the long of it and the short of it. All congenial chaps, very. Liked a nip or two, now and then. No harm in that. Had our own special arrows. That sort of thing. Competed now and then in contests with other clubs. Henry's death took the stuffing out of us and put an end to the Sussex Archers."

"The death of Mr. Pope," said Pons musingly, "would seem to warrant a few trifling questions."

"Twenty years ago, Mr. Pons," said Colvin with a mounting air of defence. "He's all dust and bone by this time. The coroner's inquest said accident."

"You insist on that, Mr. Colvin?" pressed Pons.

Beads of perspiration appeared suddenly on our host's temples. He gripped his chair arms harder.

"Damn it, sir! That was the coroner's decision, the decision of the jury."

"Not yours, Mr. Colvin."

"Not mine!"

"I submit, sir, you accepted it with reservations."

"Since you're not the police, Mr. Pons, I may say that I did."

"Not an accident, then, Mr. Colvin."

"Murder!" Our host growled the word and almost spat it out. Once having said it, he relaxed; his hands slipped back along the arms of the chair and he himself sank back. He took a deep breath, and the words came out in a rush. "I don't see how he could have been killed by accident, Mr. Pons. I don't see why he should have been murdered. We were all experienced archers, sir—*experienced!* Not given to accidents. We were all friends—close friends. Certainly I don't pretend to know what waters run between my fellow-

men, but there never was an uncongenial word among us. Besides, none of us had anything to gain by Henry's death. We had it to lose. We lost the one thing we prized among us—our archery. I've not touched my bow and arrows since the day."

"How was he killed, Mr. Colvin?"

"We were on the butts, Mr. Pons. Woods all around us. We were somewhat separated, taking positions for distance in loosing our arrows. After we had discharged arrows we pushed forward to mark our distances and see who had shot his arrow the farthest. We found Henry with an arrow in his back, dying. It was one of our arrows—we had special arrows, Mr. Pons—but unmarked."

"Unmarked?"

"Since we were trying for distance that day, we had marked our arrows individually. When we found our arrows later, we found that Henry had had time to discharge his—ironically, he had made the greatest distance." He paused, licked his lips, and continued. "All our arrows were marked that day, Mr. Pons—but the arrow that killed Henry wasn't marked. This wasn't brought out at the inquest, I need hardly say. It seemed to mean that whoever had killed Henry had brought along an unmarked arrow for that purpose."

"Was the Archers' schedule widely known?"

"Set up annually, sir," replied our host. "Anybody could have known it, if he were interested. Not many were."

"Is Mr. Pope's family still in the vicinity?" asked Pons then.

"Henry was unmarried, sir. A quiet man, retired early in life. Quite wealthy, too. His younger brother, Trevor, was his only heir. I remember what a time we had trying to reach Trevor—we didn't, in fact, get in touch with him until after Henry was buried. He was on a walking tour of the Scottish Highlands. He came back only long enough to take care of Henry's affairs, closed the Pope house on the other side of Lurgashall, and went to Canada. He came back only last May."

"And this, Mr. Colvin?"

Pons spread the warning our host had received on the table before him.

"Monstrous!" Colvin gave Pons a hard look. "I could be punished for many things, sir—but the death of Henry Pope is not one of them."

"About the arrow that killed Mr. Jefferds?" asked Pons. "Was it one of those belonging to the Sussex Archers?"

"It was. I took occasion to look hard at it at the inquest. No question about it. I was considerably shaken, as may be imagined."

"I should not be surprised," said Pons. "Let me return for a moment to your former beater, Pearson. How long had he been with you?"

"Ten years."

"You, too, have seen him skulking around?"

"Not I. Alasdair chiefly. Hewitt saw him on two occasions."

"Only recently, Mr. Pons. He seemed to be waiting for Father to come outside," put in our client.

"Man knows my habits," growled Colvin senior. "He could find me outside any time he wanted to."

"I take it you've been married more than once, Mr. Colvin."

"Ah, you saw that Alasdair's no whit like him," our host said, jerking his head toward our client. "True. Married twice. Twice a widower. Alasdair was my second wife's son; I adopted him. A good, quiet boy, a little scatter-brained. Perhaps that goes with publishing."

Pons sat for a few moments in silent contemplation, his eyes closed. Colvin flashed an impatient glance from Pons to our client, who only smiled in answer.

"And Mr. Jefferds's murder," said Pons presently "—does it occur to you that the same man whose arrow killed Henry Pope might also have been responsible for Jefferds's death?"

"Wouldn't it occur to you?" answered our host a little wildly. "But I tell you, sir, I'm at a complete loss as to who might have done it, and why it should be done! I know every member of our Sussex Archers like an open book."

"Each reader brings his own interpretation to every book," said Pons dryly.

"True, sir. But no, I don't believe it."

"You have not been to the police," said Pons.

"Damn it, sir!—we've suppressed evidence. We don't want it out now. What good would it do? An arrow used by the Sussex Archers is the only thing that ties the two murders together. The *only* thing. Mr. Pons, I know! Henry Pope was an inoffensive man; so was Andy Jefferds. Who stood to gain by their deaths? Trevor Pope, who was miles away when his brother died! Ailing Mrs. Jefferds, who needed him alive far more than anything she might inherit! Such crimes are senseless, sir—the work of a madman."





"Or a diabolically clever one."

"But this is your game, not mine, sir," said our host, pushing back his chair and rising. "I leave you to my son."

So saying, he stalked out of the room.

"I must apologize for my father," said our client uneasily.

"Pray do not do so," said Pons. "He is a badly troubled man—a simple, straightforward gentleman to whom the complexities of crime are a cloud of darkness." Pons, too, got to his feet. "About Pearson, Mr. Colvin—when was the first time you saw him loitering around?"

"Why, I believe it was the night after Mr. Jefferds was killed."

"But he *had* been about before?"

"Well, yes, Alasdair saw him—though he didn't mention it until I told Father I'd seen him. Then he came out with it—said he hadn't wanted to say it before and excite Father."

Pons stood for a moment deep in thought. Then a little smile touched his lips, and I knew he was off on a new line which pleased him. "Now, then," he said to our client, "we shall want to move about the neighbourhood. Pray do not wait upon us for luncheon or dinner. Can you spare a pony cart?"

"Come with me, Mr. Pons."

Late that afternoon we drew up at an inn on the Lurgashall side of Petworth. We had spent the day calling on the other three resident members of the disbanded Sussex Archers—Will Ockley, a semi-invalid—David Wise, who was now a clergyman—and Abel Howard, a taciturn man of late middle age who was still engaged in stock-farming experiments—from all of whom I could not determine that Pons had elicited any more information than he already had.

In the public house we made our way to the bar. Pons ordered a gin and bitters, and I my customary ale. Since it was still early evening—indeed, the sun had not yet set—there was little patronage in the pub, and the landlord, a chubby fellow with sparkling eyes and a thatch of white hair, was not loath to talk.

"Strangers hereabout?" he asked.

"On our way to see Joshua Colvin on a matter of business," said Pons. "Know him?"

"Aye. Know him well."

"What sort is he?"

The proprietor shrugged. "There's some that likes him and some that don't. Has a gruff manner and a bit of a way of telling the truth. Makes people uncomfortable."

"And his sons?"

The proprietor brightened. "Cut from different cloth altogether. Alasdair, now—he's a real sport. Comes in for the darts." He shook his head. "A bit difficult when it comes to paying for drinks. Still owes me five quid." He chuckled. "But Hewitt—well, sir, in business he's all business, and he don't come here much. But don't you be fooled by that, sir—he's an uncommon eye for the ladies. There's them could tell you a tale or two about Hewitt and the ladies! But I ain't one for gossip, never was. Live and let live, I say."

"Does not a Mr. Pope live nearby?" asked Pons then.

The landlord sobered at once. "The likes of him don't come here," he said darkly. "He don't talk to no one. And there's them that say they know why."

"And Mr. David Wise?"

"Aye—as close to a saint as you can find these days." But abruptly he stopped talking; his eyes narrowed. He flattened his hands on the bar and leaned closer to Pons, staring at him searchingly. "You're asking about the Archers. Aye! I know you sir, damme if I don't. We've met."

"I don't recall it," said Pons.

"You're Mr. Solar Pons, the detective," he said, flinging himself away from us.

Thereafter he would say no more.

We took our leave shortly after, Pons no whit displeased by the landlord's refusal to speak.

"We have one more stop to make," he said. "Little more than two miles hence."

"Trevor Pope," I said.

"Precisely. Let us have a look at him."

"He may be dangerous," I said.

"I suspect he is. Are not all men, under the right provocation?"

"We have not had what I should call a profitable day," I said.

"Ah? Every little grain of sand contributes to the making of a road," replied Pons enigmatically.

He said no more until, following the directions our client had given us, we drove down a lane into a hollow in the woodland and came to a semi-Tudor house behind a low, vinegrown stone wall. It wore a deserted appearance.

Pons halted the trap at the gate, got out, and walked to the door, where he plied the knocker.

There was a long wait before the door opened. An old servant stood there.

"Mr. Trevor Pope?" asked Pons.

"Mr. Pope doesn't wish to see anyone," said the servant. "He's going out, sir."

"I am on a matter of some urgency," said Pons.

"Mr. Pope will see no one," said the servant and closed the door.

Pons came back to the trap, got in, and drove back up the lane to the road, where he turned off into a coppice, got out once more, beckoning me to follow, and tied our pony to a sapling.

"Let us make our way back, Parker. If Mr. Trevor Pope is going out, it must be for his constitutional. He seems to go nowhere else."

We circled toward the rear of the house, taking advantage of every tree, and had scarcely come into good view of it before there burst from the direction of the kennels half a dozen great mastiffs, and in their midst, running at the same pace, a short, dark man wearing a turtle-neck sweater, tight-fitting trousers, and rubber-soled canvas shoes. They bore toward a woodland path which would take them around Lurgashall in the direction of Blackdown. The dogs made scarcely any sound; all that fell to ear was the footfalls made by Trevor Pope, and all that held to the mind's eye was the tense straining expression on his dark face, and the clenched fists at his sides.

"What madness drives him to this?" I whispered, after they had vanished in the woods.

"What, indeed! There must be an easier exercise. You cannot deny, however, that it is an impressive performance. Small wonder it startled our client."

"What do we do now?"

"It is sundown. Surely he will not be gone too long. Let us just go to meet him."

"But the dogs!" I protested.

"We shall have to chance them," answered Pons imperturbably.

He strode forward. I followed.

The course Trevor Pope had taken led in an arc away from the house; we were soon out of sight of it on a woodland path that would take us well around Lurgashall toward Blackdown. Pons paused suddenly at the edge of an open glade, where the path led down a slope in the direction of the village. There he relaxed.



"I fancy this will do as well as any place," he said. "Let us wait here."

"Pons, I don't like this," I said.

"A pity. I have an appetite for it. You may return to the trap, if you like."

"And leave you alone?"

"We are all alone, Parker. Never lose sight of that. And none of us, I fancy, is more alone than Mr. Trevor Pope."

The sun was gone, the afterglow began to fade, half an hour passed. Then came the sound of running footsteps.

"Ah, he is coming," said Pons.

Almost instantly the mastiffs and their master swept around a grove of young trees and bushes at the bottom of the slope within sight of Pons.

"Mr. Trevor Pope!" Pons called out in a loud voice and began to advance toward him.

Pope came to a stop and heeled his dogs with a savage cry. He turned a furious face toward us, flung up his arm to point at Pons, and shouted, "Stand where you are! What the hell do you want?"

"To see you."

"You see me."

"To ask you some questions."

"I answer no questions."

"One, then, Mr. Pope!" Pons's voice echoed in the glade.

"Who are you?"

"Only a curious Londoner. You may have heard my name. It is Solar Pons."

There was an audible gasp from Pope. Then, "So they've sent for you!"

"One question, Mr. Pope!"

"Go to hell, sir!"

"Can you furnish me with an itinerary of your walking tour in the Scottish Highlands in 1907?"

There was a moment of pregnant silence. Then a fierce cry of rage, a curse, and Pope's furious words, "Get out—get out!—before I turn the dogs on you. You meddling nosy parker!"

"You may not have seen the last of me, Mr. Pope."

"*You* have seen the last of *me*, sir!"

Pons turned and we went back the way we had come. There was no immediate movement behind us. When last I saw him, glancing over my shoulder as we were descending the slope toward the house and the trap beyond, Trevor Pope was standing motionless in the

circle of his mastiffs, a dark figure literally bursting with rage and hatred in the deepening dusk.

Once back in the trap, I could not help observing, "A violent man, Pons."

"Indeed," agreed Pons.

We rode in thoughtful silence until, just before reaching the stone gate piers of our client's home, Pons caught sight of someone slipping behind a cedar tree at the roadside.

He halted the trap at once, flung the reins to me, and leapt to the road. He darted around the cedar.

I heard his voice. "Mr. Pearson, I presume?"

"That's my name," answered a rough voice gruffly.

"What's your game, Pearson?"

"I got m' rights. I'm doin' no harm. This here's a public road."

"Quite right. Over two months ago you came to see Mr. Colvin."

"No, sir. Two weeks is more like it."

"You carry a gun, Mr. Pearson?"

"I ain't got a bow an' arrer!"

His inference was unmistakable. Pons abruptly bade him good-evening, and came back to the trap. He said not a word as we drove on in the deepening dark.

Our client waited for us in the hall. He was too correct to inquire how Pons had been engaged during the afternoon, though he must have been able to draw some conclusions.

"Can I get you anything to eat, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Perhaps a sandwich of cold beef and some dry wine. Chablis, or Moselle," said Pons.

"And you, Dr. Parker?"

"The same, if you please."

"I should like to talk to your father once more," said Pons.

"Before or after your sandwich, Mr. Pons?"

"Now, sir. Just take our sandwiches to our room, will you?"

"Very well, Mr. Pons. Father's in his study. We just got back from his usual walk. It was my turn to guard him tonight." He sighed. "Father makes it very difficult; it angers him to catch sight of us behind him. Just in there, Mr. Pons."

The senior Colvin sat before his stamp collection. His glance was rather more calculating than friendly.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Mr. Colvin—but may I see your bow and arrows?"

Colvin leaned back, a baffled expression on his face. "Ha!" he exclaimed. "I wish I knew where they were. Put them away when

Henry was killed, and then later put them somewhere else. Hanged if I know where they are now. That was twenty years ago, sir. Why d'you want to see 'em?"

"I have a fancy to see the weapon that killed Mr. Pope and Mr. Jefferds - and may someday kill you unless I am able to prevent it."

"You speak bluntly, sir," said Colvin, his face flushing a little. "The bow I can't show you—but you'll find one of the arrows up there."

He pointed to the wall above the fireplace. He got up.

"I'll get it down for you."

"No need, sir," said Pons. "I'll just take this hassock over and look at it."

He did so. He stood for a while before the arrow, which I thought an uncommonly long one, with a very sharp tip.

"I observe this arrow is sharp and lethal, Mr. Colvin. Is this usual?"

"Not at all, Mr. Pons. Average archery club wouldn't think of using tipped arrows. That was what made the Sussex Archers unique. Ours were all tipped. I told you, sir—we were experienced archers. Took pride in that. Took pride in the danger of tipping our arrows."

"Until Mr. Pope died."

Colvin grunted. "Until then," he said.

Pons dismounted from the hassock, restored it to its position, and bade our host good-night. Our client waited at the threshold to conduct us to our room, where our brief repast was ready for us.

"Is there anything more, Mr. Pons?" he asked at our threshold.

"One thing. Does your father take his walk every evening?"

"At about sunset, regularly, rain or shine. Only a severe storm keeps him in. He's rugged, Mr. Pons—very rugged."

"Does he usually follow the same route?"

"Roughly, yes."

"Is his route generally known in the neighbourhood?"

"I should imagine so."

"Can you take time to show me tomorrow morning where he walked tonight?"

"Certainly, sir. My office in Petworth can easily do without me for an extra hour or two."

"Thank you. Good-night, sir."

Pons ate in contemplative silence, sat for a while cradling his wine, then got up and began to pace the floor in that attitude I knew so well—head sunk on his chest, hands clasped behind him. Back and forth he went, his brow furrowed, his eyes far away,

smoke from his pipe of shag making a blue cloud about his head. I knew better than to interrupt his train of thought.

After almost two hours of this he stopped before me.

"Now, Parker, what have you to say of it all?"

"Little more than I said before. Trevor Pope flees through the dusk like a man trying to escape his guilt."

"Indeed he does!" said Pons agreeably. "I have no question but that Mr. Pope is the agent upon whose actions the entire puzzle turns."

"As I pointed out before we left Praed Street," I could not help saying.

"I recall it," continued Pons. "It does not seem to you significant that Pearson, who has been trying to see Joshua Colvin, has not yet been able to do so, though he knows his routine and could find him outside the house any time he wishes?"

"The fellow is clearly playing some game intended to intimidate his former employer."

"That is surely one way of looking at it. But let me put another question—did it suggest nothing to you that each of the onetime Sussex Archers we questioned today held exactly the same views as our host? None would speak a word against any other, yet each was convinced that Henry Pope's death was not an accident."

"Theirs seems to be the only tenable view, the inquest notwithstanding," I said, not without some smug satisfaction.

"I fear you are only too content to find support for your views," said Pons with equanimity. "I would find it more challenging another way."

"If we doctors failed to face up to the obvious, I'm afraid our patients would soon be in peril of their lives."

"Yet medicine is, comparatively speaking, no more an exact science than that of ratiocination," said Pons, with a twinkle in his eyes. "The chemistry of each individual differs from that of every other, however infinitesimally. But to go on—I submit it is an interesting coincidence that Jefferds should have been killed at twilight, the precise hour Trevor Pope is about with his mastiffs."

"Would you have it otherwise?" I cried. "That was the hour for him to commit the crime!"

"One would have thought he would be less bold about it and given himself some kind of alibi."

"Ah, well," I could not help saying, "how was he to know that Solar Pons might be called in!"

"*Touché!*" cried Pons, laughing.

"I suppose," I went on, "you have constructed a perfect case about Pearson?"

"Ah, Parker, you continually surprise me. Pearson is certainly in the matter—up to his eyes, shall we say?—or I am dead wrong. Let me see," he went on, looking at his watch, "it is now after eleven o'clock. Inspector Jamison will certainly be at home by this time. Now if I can manage to reach the telephone without arousing the household, I will just have a little talk with him."

So saying, he slipped out of our room to place a trunk-call.

When he came back, he vouchsafed no information.

Next morning Pons deliberately dawdled about the house until the call he was expecting came at ten o'clock. He took it, listened, said less than ten words, thanked Inspector Jamison, and rang off.

All this time our client had been standing by, waiting to be of service to us.

"One more thing, Mr. Colvin," said Pons. "As I mentioned last night, I have a mind to follow the course your father customarily takes on his evening walks. Can it be done?"

"Certainly, sir. Come along."

Hewitt Colvin led the way out of the house and struck off into the surrounding woods. We followed him, Pons commenting now and then on nothing more profound than the numbers of chaffinches or thrushes put up at our passing.

Our course led down the slope of Blackdown toward the Weald, away from Lurgashall. Pons's eyes darted here and there. Occasionally he commented on the view to be had from openings in the trees, and once he asked about the proximity of Trevor Pope's course.

"The paths intersect at that copse just ahead, Mr. Pons," said our client. "That's where I saw Pope and his mastiffs."

We passed through the copse, which consisted of one very large old chestnut, surrounded by fifty or more younger trees. We had not gone far beyond it, when Pons suddenly excused himself, and ran back into it, bidding us wait for him.

"Odd chap," said our client dryly.

"There are others who think so," I said.

In a few moments Pons rejoined us, his eyes dancing. "I believe we have seen enough, Mr. Colvin," he said. "I wanted especially to make sure that there was a point of intersection between your

father's course and Trevor Pope's. It seems to serve the purpose for which it is intended."

"I am glad you think so, Mr. Pons."

Pons looked at his watch. "And now, if you will forgive me, we seem to have accomplished for the time being everything we can, and if you will drive us into Petworth, we can catch the 12:45 to London."

"I can drive you to London, Mr. Pons."

"I would not dream of putting you to the trouble, sir. Pray pay my respects to your father, and say to him that I have every hope of laying hands upon the murderer of Mr. Jefferds within forty-eight hours."

"You've laid a trap for Trevor Pope!" cried our client.

"We shall have to take the murderer in the act," said Pons.

"Pope is desperate. I aggravated him severely last evening. Tell your brother to take exceptional care when he follows your father tonight."

We walked back to the house, and within a few minutes we were in our client's car on our way to Petworth, where we were deposited at the station.

"Surely, Mr. Pons," said Hewitt Colvin from his driver's seat, "you will permit me to take you to London. Your train is still half an hour away; we could be halfway there by that time."

"I have a fancy to look about this charming old village, Mr. Colvin. I prefer to do so now. You will hear from me soon."

With this, our client had to be content. He drove away, I knew, filled with misgivings, but surely with no more than troubled me.

"Now, then," said Pons the moment he was out of sight, "let us deposit our bags and spend a little time wandering about Petworth. We might take a bite of lunch."

"We'll miss our train, Pons!"

Pons favoured me with an amused smile. "We're not taking the train, Parker. We have an engagement with a murderer this evening. I expect to keep it. For the nonce, we'll look about Petworth—visit Old Petworth Church, and Petworth House adjacent to it—about them the entire village revolves, as spokes about the hub of a wheel. Petworth House is eminently worth your attention, the deprecations of Ruskin's followers notwithstanding. And the village's narrow, wandering streets with their kinship to the contours of this land have a charm quite their own."

I gazed at him, I fear, with open-mouthed astonishment.

"And afterward, I almost hesitate to tell you, we have at least a three-mile walk into the woods—closer to four, I make it."

"Pons!" I cried at last—"You're mad!"

"It becomes me," said he.

Just before sunset we made our way into that copse of trees where Joshua Colvin's path crossed that of Trevor Pope. Pons had an objective clearly in view—it was the old chestnut tree with a hollow at shoulder height and down one side of the tree—a low-branched tree which dominated the copse, and, indeed, much of the surrounding landscape.

"This is our rendezvous," said Pons. "If I am not in error, this is Joshua Colvin's night of peril. I hope to prevent his death and take his would-be murderer in the act. Now, then, up into the tree, Parker. Well up."

Within a few moments we were out of sight up along the trunk of the old chestnut, Pons taking care to be along the far side, away from the direction from which Pope might come, but in a place from which he might freely drop to the ground.

"But the dogs, Pons," I cried. "What of them?"

"We shall deal with them if the need arises," he answered. "Now, then, the sun is setting—we may expect Joshua Colvin to set out soon on his round. It will take him half an hour to reach here."

"And Pope, running from a greater distance, as long," I mused. "How it all works out!"

"How indeed! Now let us be silent and wait upon events. Whatever you see, Parker—make no sound!"

The sun went down, the sky paled, changing from aquamarine to a band of magenta and saffron with mother-of-pearl clouds moving toward the zenith. The vespers of the birds fell sweetly to ear—the songs of sky-larks, cuckoos, wrens, wheatears, and curlews—and bats began to flitter noiselessly about. Then, promptly on time, Joshua Colvin entered the wood, his gun held carelessly in the crook of one arm, and passed within sight of the tree.

He had hardly gone before Alasdair Colvin sauntered within sight. And then there occurred one of those strangely terrifying scenes which the mind is always unwilling at first to accept. The younger Colvin came straight to the chestnut tree and set his gun down against the old bole. He took from his pockets a pair of skin-

tight gloves, into which he hastily slipped his hands. Then he reached down into the opening in the chestnut tree and drew forth a bow and arrow!

At this moment Pons hurtled down upon him.

Startled at last from my almost paralyzed shock, I scrambled down the trunk and dropped after Pons.

Alasdair Colvin fought like a beast, with a burst of strength surprising in one so slight of body, but Pons and I managed to subdue him just as the elder Colvin came running upon the scene, drawn back by the sound of the struggle. Seeing the bow and arrow lying nearby, Joshua Colvin understood the meaning of the scene at once. He raised his gun and fired twice to bring help.

"Serpent!" he grated. "Ungrateful serpent!" Then, spurning the prostrate young man, he turned to Pons. "But why? Why?"

"You will find that your son was heavily in debt, Mr. Colvin. I suspect also that he was being blackmailed by Pearson. Your son killed Andrew Jefferds and planned your death in an attempt to recreate an old crime and fasten it upon an old murderer."

"An old crime?"

"Henry Pope's murder. It was almost certainly his brother who slew him. Your paths crossed here, within minutes, though tonight, unaccountably, he is evidently not coming—which would have served Alasdair grievously had he succeeded in his diabolical plan."

From the direction of the house came the sound of running footsteps.

In our compartment bound for London at last, Pons yielded to my entreaties.

"It seemed to me at the outset that, while not impossible, it was highly improbable that anyone would exact vengeance twenty years after the event to be avenged," he said. "And it would certainly have been the greatest folly to announce 'punishment' to those suspected of having committed the murder of Henry Pope, for this would surely focus attention upon Trevor Pope, the one man who might conceivably want to avenge his brother's death. It seemed therefore elementary that these messages were intended explicitly to do just that.

"Proceeding from this conclusion, I had only to look around for motive. Who would benefit at Joshua Colvin's death but his sons? Hewitt Colvin would hardly have enlisted my help had he been involved in any plan against his father's life. That left only Alasdair.



But what motive could he have? Curiously enough, it was the landlord of the inn in Petworth who furnished a motive when he mentioned that Alasdair still owed him so trifling a sum as five pounds—a motive which was strengthened when Jamison informed me this morning, in response to my request for an inquiry into the matter, that Alasdair Colvin was deeply in debt to bookies and in various gaming houses—a matter of over five thousand pounds.

"The plan was conceived with wonderful cleverness. A pity Andrew Jefferds had to die—a sacrifice to Alasdair Colvin's vanity. Everyone knew the elder Colvin's routine—and Alasdair knew that Trevor Pope would not be able to supply himself with an alibi at that hour of the day. Moreover, the arrows and the bow Alasdair had taken from his father's effects and hidden in the tree could as readily have belonged to the late Henry Pope. Trevor Pope alone knew that there was no reason for vengeance against the Sussex Archers—for he unquestionably killed his brother; he alone had motive and opportunity—that vague walking tour of the Highlands enabled him to slip back, commit the crime—the itinerary of the Archers was arranged annually, according to Colvin senior—and return to the Highlands to be 'discovered' after well-planned difficulties.

"Unhappily for Alasdair, two little events he had not counted upon took place. The beater, Pearson, came upon him the night of Jefferds's murder—which also occurred at twilight, when Trevor Pope was out with his mastiffs—and very probably saw him with the bow in hand before he had the chance to conceal it. Though Pearson may have come originally to see the elder Colvin, he came thereafter to see Alasdair for the purpose of blackmailing him. You will recall the discrepancy between Alasdair's statement that he had seen Pearson months ago, and Pearson's own claim, corroborated by Hewitt's failure to see him, that it was 'more like two weeks' than two months. So Pearson suspected, and was thus in it up to his eyes!

"The other event, of course, was Hewitt's application at 7B. A neat little problem, Parker. Tomorrow, I fancy, I shall endeavour to trace Trevor Pope's Highlands itinerary—difficult as that will be."

But the solution of the secondary mystery was not to be Pons's, for the morning papers announced the suicide by hanging of Trevor Pope, who, though he left no message behind, evidently saw in Pons's presence on the scene of his own dastardly crime the working of a belated nemesis.

# *The Adventure of the Cloverdale Kennels*

THE CURIOUS PUZZLE of the Cloverdale Kennels came to the attention of my friend, Solar Pons, late one night in the same summer which saw the diverting case of the reluctant scholar, Ivor Allanmain, the riddle of the Sussex Archers, and the singular affair of the Lost Dutchman. Indeed, I had just finished filing my notes on two of these cases, and was preparing to retire, content to leave Pons bent like a lean and hungry bird of prey over his retorts, deep in a chemical problem, when the outer bell rang.

Pons glanced at the clock on the mantel. "Mrs. Johnson will surely have retired by this hour," he said. "Run down and see who it is, Parker, like a good fellow."

Our caller proved to be a messenger boy with a wire for Pons. I asked him to wait for an answer.

Pons eagerly tore open the envelope. His keen eyes scanned the message before he handed it to me.

CAN YOU COME HASLEMERE AT ONCE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR  
ASSISTANCE IN MYSTERIOUS DEATH EDWARD HARTON—  
HETHERMAN

"Hetherman," I said, looking up. "Do I know him?"

"You may recall that extraordinary occasion when Inspector Jamison asked me to talk on the science of ratiocination to a group of provincial police-officers meeting in London, Parker. Detective-Sergeant Hetherman was in the contingent from Surrey and came up to speak to me after the meeting. He cannot be more than thirty now, but struck me even then as a bright and promising young man."

There was no need to ask whether Pons intended to run down to Haslemere, for he had already taken up the Railway Guide and had begun to turn its pages.

"Harton's death must have taken place within the past few hours," he said thoughtfully. "There was nothing about it in the evening papers, and the most recent news bulletin on the B.B.C. made no mention of it." He paused, his eyes arrested. "Ah, here we

are. We've just missed the last train from Waterloo by a quarter of an hour. The next suitable one is at 8:30 in the morning. If your practise can spare you, we will be on it." His glance challenged me. "What do you say, Parker?"

"You know my answer," I replied.

Pons rapidly scrawled a message to Detective-Sergeant Hetherman, and I delivered it to the waiting messenger below.

It lacked but a few minutes to ten o'clock next morning when the train drew into the station at Haslemere, in Surrey. Sergeant Hetherman stood waiting for us in the chill, misty air. He was a slender man, as tall as Pons, with close-cropped hair and warm blue eyes. He shook my hand, at our introduction, with genuine heartiness.

"I have a car waiting, Mr. Pons," he said. "This is a country matter, and we must drive out of Haslemere. Have you had breakfast?"

"I prefer to dispense with food when I confront one of those little problems which give me so much pleasure," answered Pons, as we walked toward the car. "I could not help observing, Sergeant, that you carefully avoided calling Harton's death 'murder.' Is there doubt?"

"Well, sir, there is—but not much in my own mind. There seems to be a rather general acceptance among the neighbours that Harton took his own life. If he did so, his method was singularly roundabout, and there's no motive for suicide that I've been able to uncover."

"Perhaps we had better have an account of the matter," suggested Pons, as we seated ourselves in Sergeant Hetherman's car.

"Very well, Mr. Pons. Harton was an employee of Mr. George Pelham, a businessman in Haslemere. Pelham's hobby is sporting dogs. Harton was manager and trainer at the Cloverdale Kennels, owned by Pelham. These kennels are approximately four miles out of Haslemere, and Harton didn't stay there; he had rooms with Mr. and Mrs. Martin Coster, whose home is about half a mile away from the kennels. Harton had been in the vicinity for six years or so. He was well known and well liked, to hear people talk."

"It always seems possible to prefer the outsider to the native," said Pons. "It is a sad reflection upon human nature that it is so. Where was Harton from?"

"London. Pelham had brought him down."

"A racing man?"

"No record of it, Mr. Pons."

"You certainly made inquiries, of course."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

"He came recommended?"

"Very well, sir. Pelham is a man who'd make certain of that—a real martinet and a bit stuffy."

"Very well. Go on, please."

"The kennels are one longish building, with the manager's little office—a small room with space for his assistant, Roger Ballinger, to work in—at one end. Harton was in the habit of working at a high desk, sitting on a stool, immediately next to the window at the very end of his quarters. He was sitting there last night when he was shot from a little grove of beech-trees at the edge of the property, exactly a hundred yards away. He was shot with a rifle carefully supported by the crook of a beech-tree branch, which was in line with the window."

"You recovered the weapon?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Is that not somewhat unusual in cases of murder, Sergeant?"

"Indeed it is, Mr. Pons."

Pons smiled. "I detect a note of uncertainty in your voice, Sergeant. What struck you?"

"Mr. Pons, it was his own rifle with which he was killed," answered Hetherman. "Furthermore, there was a cord attached to the trigger, and this cord was looped around the broken end of a stout twig, and carried back to the open window through which he was shot."

"Only to it?"

"No, over the sill and into the room."

"Within reach of Harton?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He could have pulled the cord."

Pons's eyes danced. "I believe my illustrious predecessor demonstrated his remarkable abilities in a matter of like nature on a country estate near Winchester, if I am not mistaken. Shall we find it similar, I wonder? A hundred yards of cord! I fancy we have to deal with a remarkably cool intelligence. You have removed the rifle, Sergeant?"

"We examined it, of course, but we replaced it this morning specifically for your scrutiny. We have removed the body, however."

"Naturally, naturally. Now then, if we accept your conclusion that there was no motive—at least not a patent one—for suicide,

did Harton have enemies who might wish to see him out of the way? Or who might wish him grievous harm?"

"I doubt it, sir."

Pons chuckled. "Dear me, Sergeant. Again that note of uncertainty. Why?"

"Mr. Pons, it's like this. Harton was quite a man with the ladies. He was engaged for a good while to the daughter of his landlord, Miss Ethel Coster, but their engagement never seemed to get anywhere. A fortnight ago it came out that Harton had taken up with Miss Alice Fisher, and meant to marry her. She'd been engaged to Ronald Farrow, and had broken their engagement. Perhaps she was tired of waiting for him. Sometimes engagements run a long time in the country."

"Had this one?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Three years. And naturally, Farrow was furious. He put the blame on Harton, though it's my opinion that if there's any blame to be fixed it should be fixed on the lady, since she's the one to make up her mind and the man usually hasn't much to say about it. Now there's talk about that Farrow made some threatening remarks concerning Harton. But Farrow is known to be a blustering sort, unlikely to take any kind of action. All promise and no fulfilment, if you know what I mean, Mr. Pons."

"Ah, but sometimes the worm may turn, Sergeant."

"I know, Mr. Pons. I'm afraid that people hereabouts really think it *has* turned. That's why they're all so close-mouthed and so eager to believe in Harton's suicide. Because, for all his bluster, Farrow is more popular than Harton was. Harton wasn't a good mixer, if it came down to it—didn't drink much, even though he went down to one of the pubs now and then for a game of darts."

"Everyone is capable of murder, Sergeant," reflected Pons. "Even if you are convinced Farrow is innocent."

"I am, it's true, sir. But then, you may be right, and I wrong. You come to know people one-sided like, and you set them in your mind in a sort of groove. They might not be that way at all. But here we are at the scene, Mr. Pons. Now you may have a look around for yourself."

As he spoke, the car drew up into the driveway of a building some sixty feet in length, before which two constables stood on guard. From it rose the voices of several dogs, which carried sharply to the ear in the damp morning air. The mists were now rising a little, but still held to the countryside, filling the vales, so that trees

seemed to rise out of them without trunks, making a spectral appearance in the landscape.

Sergeant Hetherman led the way into that end of the building which was clearly not used for kennels. The door opened upon a large room, obviously that of the manager and trainer. From this room another door on the right opened to an inner room, adjacent to the kennels, and a second door opened into a small room with a desk and some shelving, from which in turn two rather wide windows opened on the lawn outside the building. It was obvious that it was in this small room that Harton had died, for the high stool on which he had been sitting to work at the old-fashioned desk still lay on its side, and chalk marks, together with a splash of congealed blood on the floor, indicated the position of the body when found. Sergeant Hetherman led us directly into this room.

"As you see, Mr. Pons, this is where the body lay. And there," he said, pointing to the sill of one of the open windows, "is the cord. The bullet entered Harton's head just above and behind the left eye, passed through, and lodged over there in the wall. You can see where we dug it out."

Pons walked over to the window and examined the cord. "Sixteen-ply," he murmured. "And seven feet of it in over the sill." He looked out the window. "It lies slack down the wall and across the grass. I take it that is the copse over there—just coming through the mist, Sergeant?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Dear me. He would have had to reel in the cord to get a tight enough hold on it to set off the rifle."

"Yes, sir."

Pons gazed at the end of the cord. "Cut with scissors, I see."

"I hadn't noticed."

"I fancy you can't miss the obvious pressure marks from both sides," said Pons. "A knife tears from one side. The cut is very clean. I submit it was made by small pocket scissors, not by large blades."

He dropped the cord and scrutinized the window-sill, running his fingertips lightly over it along the course of the cord. He leaned out the window once more, peering intently at the grass-covered ground beneath, and made clucking sounds with his tongue.

"Prints, too," he murmured. "Did any of your men walk up to this window, Sergeant?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Well, well, let us just see."

Pons turned and went out of the building. Presently he came into view outside the window, where he immediately went on his knees to peer intently at scarcely visible footprints in the still wet grass. A heavy dew made a faint outline of footprints leading up to the window and back toward the copse—or, quite possibly, the other way round. They were the prints of a man's heavy shoes, but were not, I judged, exact enough to enable the shoes themselves to be identified from them, for the dew outlined only the general indentation, and some of the grass forming its outline had already sprung back into place from the previous evening, when the footprints had presumably been made, for dew lay in the depression of the prints as well as outside.

Pons, meanwhile, paced off several of the steps. His stride was manifestly longer than the stride of the man who had made the footprints, even at an area where the steps indicated that whoever had made them had been running. He looked back at us, watching him from the window.

"Are these not short steps for a man with such large feet, Sergeant?" he asked.

"I would say so, Mr. Pons."

"Hm! Singular, singular indeed." He got down on his knees once more, peering intently at one footprint after another. "Uneven, too," he said. "In one area, he has been running. This suggests nothing, Sergeant?"

"I fail to see it, sir."

"Would someone about to commit suicide act in such haste? Surely deliberation is the key to suicide."

"In most cases. An exception certainly isn't impossible."

"But unlikely."

Pons picked up a strand or two of what I took to be cobweb; in another place he took from the footprint he was examining what appeared to be the torn fragment of a long leaf.

He got up finally, brushing at wet patches on his knees. "I commend these prints to your earnest attention, Sergeant," said Pons. "They are highly significant. Come along."

We hastened outside to join Pons, who was following alongside the line of footprints toward the copse. From time to time he bent down, picked up some minuscule object, and flicked it away or returned it to the place from which he had taken it. He was careful not to tread upon the white cord which lay beside the prints and

ran up through the bushes to vanish behind the leaves of the copse. His eyes were aglow with suppressed excitement, as if the footprints told him far more than was visible to any other eye. In this manner we reached the copse.

Pons walked carefully around to where he could see the rifle propped in the crotch of a tree and supported by a limb under the stock. It was aimed from among leaves and pendant branches directly at the window. The white cord was still tied to the trigger. For the moment, however, he gave this but a cursory examination; he was still intent upon the prints, and he studied their leaving and entering the copse. Not satisfied with his scrutiny from his knees, he lay prone, regardless of the wet grass, and gazed at the prints with singular care. On the far side of the copse the prints were lost in deep grass which divided the copse from a gravel path.

Having seen so much, Pons returned to the rifle. His face wore the look of a dog on the scent. Without a word, he examined the loop of the cord around the broken branch.

"Freshly broken, I see," said Pons.

"Yes, sir."

"I submit it was for this purpose. Would not the sound of a breaking branch have disturbed Harton?"

"It might have."

"He could have heard it, in any event. But there is nothing to show that it was not broken after Harton's death."

"No, sir."

"Just come over here, Sergeant. Let me call your attention to the bark of the twig at the point of contact with the cord, and to the cord itself where it passes over the twig."

Sergeant Hetherman turned puzzled eyes upon the twig and the cord. His honest young face reflected his perplexity, but he forebore to put it into words.

"Most instructive," murmured Pons in his most irritating manner, without any intention of enlightening us.

Pons now turned his back upon the rifle and again resumed his scrutiny of the ground, now and then again dropping to his knees, as he progressed through the copse. When he came to the little open stretch of deeper grass beyond, he paused.

"Your men have walked through here, Sergeant?" he asked.

"Only along the near edge, Mr. Pons. We were looking for the footprints."

"You did not find them."



"No, Mr. Pons. Someone had passed through during the previous twenty-four hours—a child, perhaps, or a large animal—but certainly not the owner of the shoes or boots which made the prints leading to the kennels."

"So that it may have been that the tracks we followed came out from the kennels and returned there."

"We haven't discarded that possibility, Mr. Pons."

"It is always wise to keep an open mind, Sergeant. The obvious is sometimes most to be distrusted."

Pons pushed on through the deep grass to the gravel path, at which he looked with some annoyance.

"Where does this path lead, Sergeant?" he asked.

"To the road on the one side, and on the other to a lane which doubles back into Haslemere."

"A pity it is here. And the road?"

"The road is a continuation of the one we followed to the kennels, sir. It goes on to Bordon and turns north again for Godalming."

Pons stood for a moment deep in thought. Then he turned abruptly back toward the copse, passed through it, and went on to the Cloverdale Kennels once more, returning to the room where Harton had met his death. We were at his heels.

"If Harton sat at this desk, he must have been working," Pons said as Sergeant Hetherman came up behind him. "At what?"

"Mr. Pons, he was writing a personal letter."

"To whom?"

"I have it here." The Sergeant took a single sheet of notepaper from a leather folder in his breast pocket and handed it to Pons.

I read it over Pons's shoulder.

"The Kennels.

"Fifth.

"Look aren't you making rather a fool of yourself with all this threatening and so on? It sounds like the devil, and it makes you look a good deal worse than if you just kept still. I've destroyed your notes—because you'd really look a fool if they fell into anybody else's hands, wouldn't you? By the way, I'd be obliged if you'd send back my. . . ."

Thus far Harton had got in his letter when he was interrupted. There was, however, nothing to show that he was at work on this letter when he was shot no blot of ink, or scrawl of the pen,

which might have been expected if the writer had been shot at this point.

Pons's thoughts had taken the same direction. "There would seem to be no way of demonstrating that this letter had not been begun earlier in the day, Sergeant."

"No, Mr. Pons."

"So that, if he were engaged on a report which someone might find expedient should never see the light of day, for example, such a report could have been abstracted from the desk before the body was discovered."

"It's quite possible, sir. But I wouldn't know what kind of a report, Mr. Pons."

"Suppose he were preparing a report on his assistant, Sergeant. There are any number of possibilities."

"I see, sir," said the Sergeant dubiously.

"At what time, approximately, did the event take place?"

"That seems to have been determined quite exactly, Mr. Pons," said Sergeant Hetherman with some animation. "The shot was heard by several people. Roger Ballinger was walking dogs, as was his custom at that hour. Coster was in one of his fields, just finishing trimming the hedge. Mrs. Coster was in the house. Miss Ethel was out beside one of the buildings on the farm teaching a new dog to retrieve. While none of them looked at a clock, all are agreed that the shot sounded just at dusk—a few minutes past nine o'clock I make it."

"Did anyone investigate it?"

"No. Coster thought someone was shooting at jackdaws. Mrs. Coster heard it but didn't register it clearly as a shot. Miss Ethel thought it was the backfiring of someone's motor. And Ballinger took it for boys at target practise. He had heard shots earlier in the evening, and seen some boys from Haslemere cycling out to a target range; he thought one of them might have fired a parting shot for the evening before returning to the village."

"Then Ballinger discovered the body?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. When he came back, he put the dogs into their kennels; then he went around to the office and found Harton."

Pons looked at his watch. "It is now eleven. Presumably Costers will be about the farm. I should like to talk to them."

"You'll find them very straightforward people, sir," said Sergeant Hetherman. "We follow that lane beyond the copse; that will take us directly to their farm."

The three Costers were at home when we arrived at their pleasant

little country house. Learning that Pons and I had not yet broken our fast, Mrs. Coster, a buxom, capable woman with flashing brown eyes, insisted upon preparing bacon and eggs for us, while Sergeant Hetherman explained our presence.

"It was a great shock to all of us, Mr. Pons," said Mrs. Coster. "Edward was like one of the family, you might say. Of course, he was planning to leave us, now that it was likely he'd be married."

"Did he at any time show signs of nervousness or irritability, of being afraid for his life?" asked Pons.

"Never," said Mrs. Coster firmly.

"He wasn't afraid of nought nor anybody," said Coster in rough tones. His voice rumbled up from deep within his stout, hard-muscled body.

"But he told me just last week he'd had some threatening notes," said Miss Ethel Coster in a gentle voice.

"Could we see them?" asked Pons.

"I believe he destroyed them," she answered. "He didn't take them seriously."

Mrs. Coster gave her daughter a hard look.

"How did Harton react to these threats, Miss Coster?" pressed Pons.

"He was annoyed."

"He didn't mention their author?"

"No, Mr. Pons. I suppose they weren't signed—though he didn't say so."

"Did he acknowledge any enemies?"

Here Coster put in an answer. "Them as didn't like Pelham didn't like Harton. You know how 'tis with people."

"Mr. Coster," said his wife warningly.

"And there are people who don't like Mr. Pelham, I take it," said Pons reflectively.

"Tain't so much him, as what 'e does with his dogs."

"Mr. Coster," said his wife again.

"And what is that, Mr. Coster?" insisted Pons.

"They do say—crooked racing."

"I see. And people would quite understandably believe Harton had a hand in it."

"People who didn't know him might," said Mrs. Coster quickly. "None of us would."

Pons gazed at her thoughtfully. "Where were you, Mrs. Coster, when you heard the shot?"

"Right in this room, Mr. Pons."

"And you, Mr. Coster?"

"Up in the field."

Pons turned to Miss Ethel Coster.

"I was outside," she said.

"Can you show me, Miss Coster?"

"Certainly."

She rose at once and led the way outside. She was not so much attractive as appealing, a woman close to thirty years of age, I judged, and there was a confident ease about her movements. She was plainly what most men would call "all woman." As soon as she stepped outside, her dog fell in at her heels.

She paused beside a long grain-trough. "I stood about here, Mr. Pons."

Pons bent, picked up one of a pair of heavy boots lying there beside the trough. He threw it, turning to the dog as he did so to cry, "Fetch, sir!"

The dog gave Pons a curious look, but did not move.

Miss Coster began to laugh. "You don't seem to have any power over dogs, Mr. Pons. Perhaps the ladies resist you, too?"

Pons smiled. "I remain dogless and a bachelor by choice, Miss Coster. But of course your dog is not really a retriever, is he?"

"No, Mr. Pons. I tried with little success for an hour or more last evening to teach him to retrieve. You see how little he has learned."

Pons turned and looked back in the direction of the Cloverdale Kennels. "The shot must have been heard quite clearly from here," he said thoughtfully.

"It was, Mr. Pons. But you know, with all the calling to the dog, and the dog's barking, I couldn't be sure it was a shot. It was only afterwards—when. . . ." Here she paused and bit her lip, the only sign of emotion she had so far shown at the death of the man who had until so recently been her fiancé.

"Well, we must not keep Mrs. Coster's food waiting," said Pons briskly.

After a delicious repast, we started back for the Kennels once more, Pons having expressed the wish to talk to Roger Ballinger. The morning mists had now risen; sunlight shone from every drop of dew, and the countryside glowed with green, touched by heather now beginning to bloom. The great mound of Hindhead rose in the northwest, and the slopes of the generally high country where Haslemere lay—the highest land in Surrey—aglow in the morning sun, set Pons to musing of that distinguished citizen of Haslemere named Oglethorpe who had founded Georgia in the United States,

and of the Dolmetsch family of musicians who made the town their home—all this somewhat to Sergeant Hetherman's perplexity, for, being unacquainted with Pons's annoying manner of speaking about anything but the matter in hand, he was woefully bewildered.

Ballinger was not alone at the Kennels when we arrived. The owner was with him. Ballinger was a lithe young man of twenty-five, while Pelham was a thickset man of fifty or more; the one was as polished as the other was rough.

"I'm glad Hetherman had the good sense to call you in, Mr. Pons," said Pelham at being introduced to us. "Though it seems perfectly clear to me. I understand they've detained Farrow for questioning. They'll have it out of him."

"If I have a vice, it is distrust of the obvious, Mr. Pelham," said Pons.

"Stuff and nonsense, sir," said Pelham gruffly. "It's a simple matter. Either Harton committed suicide or he didn't. He had no reason to commit suicide. . . ."

"None at least so far known to us," said Pons.

Pelham brushed this aside. "So if he didn't take his own life, then he was murdered—cord or no cord. If you ask me, the cord's a red herring. I'll say it straight, Mr. Pons—young Farrow had reason to get even with Edward Harton. Even if Harton didn't send him those notes."

Pons turned to the Sergeant. "Notes, Sergeant Hetherman?"

The Sergeant looked apologetic. "Farrow claimed to have received notes in the post taunting him with not being a man—to let Harton take his girl from him."

"You neglected to mention it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Pons. We have no evidence that this is so. Farrow says he destroyed them. He may never have received them."

"How many?"

"Three, he said."

Pelham snorted impatiently. He turned and flung his arm toward the copse. "And there are prints of a man's shoes there. What more do you need?"

"I submit there are one or two points that would seem to need elucidation," said Pons. "For instance, the prints were made by someone who walked awkwardly, as if in some way physically defective. He was also unusually light for the size of the prints, for, if you will observe those in the bare soil around the copse near the path, you will notice that no very great indentation has been made.

And such as are there are most uneven, indeed. I've not seen Mr. Farrow; I am not sure at this point that it will be necessary to avail myself of the privilege of speaking to him. I rather think there is nothing I can learn from him. Is he, Mr. Pelham, either physically defective or unusually light?"

Pelham glared at Pons in astonishment not unmixed with a little scorn. "Farrow's a big man—almost as big as I am. He's no lightweight."

"So then, let us eliminate him," continued Pons. "Could it be possible that your employee, discovering that he had become unwittingly involved in a scandal, took his own life?"

Again Pelham snorted. "What kind of talk is this, Mr. Pons? What scandal?"

"Let us just speculate for the moment, Mr. Pelham, and suggest that it might be fixed races."

A cloud of rage darkened Pelham's face; his nostrils began to twitch with fury. He half raised a clenched fist as if to strike Pons, but controlled himself with manifest effort.

"I bid you good-day, Mr. Solar Pons," he said, turning on his heel to stalk away.

"Mr. Pelham is a man of strong temper," said Pons, after Pelham had driven away.

"Perhaps your example was ill-advised, sir," said Ballinger loyally.

"If so, it was by design," said Pons crisply. He gazed for a moment intensely at Ballinger. "I daresay you will inherit Harton's position, Mr. Ballinger?"

"Mr. Pelham has suggested as much," answered Ballinger stiffly.

Pons nodded. "Now, sir, you were out walking the dogs, I understand, when the fatal shot was fired."

"I was, Mr. Pons. It's my custom to take the two Dobermans out at that time of the evening."

"Invariably?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Were you seen by anyone?"

Ballinger flushed a little, as if startled by Pons's question. He cleared his throat nervously and said, "No, Mr. Pons."

"I fancy this custom of yours was known to all persons interested in the Kennels?"

"I believe it was. People who come here at all are generally aware of our routine."

"So that anyone intending harm to Harton could be certain that

you would not be in the immediate vicinity of his office?"

"I believe that is correct, Mr. Pons. I take the dogs over along the road to Bordon, and we walk for somewhat over a mile to a culvert where the dogs run loose for a bit. Then we return. I'm usually gone about forty minutes. I leave here when the sun's gone down or a bit before."

Pons stood for a moment tugging at the lobe of his left ear. Then he said, "I daresay you knew Harton as well as anyone. Did he seem in any way troubled recently?"

Ballinger grinned grimly. "Troubled? Well, Mr. Pons, he was always having woman trouble, if you know what I mean. Otherwise, no."

"Did he ever make any adverse reference to Donald Farrow?"

Ballinger shrugged. "Only to the extent of calling him an oaf in conversations with me. But perhaps he did so elsewhere; when he was irritated, he wasn't very tactful. I think anyone could tell you that. Try the pub—the Plough Inn on the near edge of Haslemere; he was there often enough, and I suspect they'd tell you the same thing."

"Did you yourself ever have any disagreements with him, Mr. Ballinger?"

"Only such as might arise between a professional and a man coming almost new into the game. And I'd have to admit I had coming what I got."

"In short, Harton lived pretty much for himself, without regard for the reactions of others?"

"Don't we all, Mr. Pons? I mean, we all think first of ourselves. That's only human. Some of us do it smoothly, and some don't care. Like Mr. Harton."

Pons nodded. "Tell me, Mr. Ballinger, was Harton in the habit of bringing his rifle to the Kennels?"

"I never knew him to bring his rifle here, sir."

"He shot game?"

"Yes, sir. Apart from women, it was his only recreation, Mr. Pons."

"Thank you. That's all, Mr. Ballinger."

Ballinger walked back toward the Kennels, leaving us to stand where we were. For a few moments Pons said nothing, but his eyes were fixed on a point in space far ahead of him, and wore that expression of intense concentration which gave evidence of the ratiocinative process. It was Sergeant Hetherman who broke in upon him.

"Mr. Pons, if I might ask—you called my attention to the cord and the twig around which it was looped. I've examined it and found nothing."

"Precisely, Sergeant. That was the point. There was no evidence that the cord had ever been tightened on the twig—no rubbing of the bark, no fragments of bark adhering to the cord, which indicated that the cord had been put up only to distract us from evidence of murder. That should dispose effectively of the inclination to believe that Harton took his own life."

Sergeant Hetherman nodded, as if to confirm his own convictions.

"A singularly well thought out murder, too, Sergeant," continued Pons. "By the way, you ought to lose no time setting Farrow free. He had nothing whatever to do with Harton's death."

"Very well, Mr. Pons."

"As for the murderer," continued Pons, "I rather think that if you pick up that pair of boots standing beside Coster's grain-trough, you'll find that they will fit the prints you've marked off leading into and out of the copse on the side toward the lane. Moreover, a close scrutiny of the grass should reveal to you—as it did to me—tiny fragments of fertilizer, maize-husk, and maize-silk, which indicate that the wearer came from a farm in the vicinity—not far enough away to have worn off this evidence—though I fancy the boots were carried to the scene and back. Coster would seem to be one of the few farmers who is experimenting in the raising of maize, and the evidence therefore, is conclusive."

"Coster!" cried Sergeant Hetherman. "But why?"

Pons gave him a sympathetic glance. "Alas, no, Sergeant. Harton was slain by Miss Ethel Coster, wearing her father's brogans. Coster in his own shoes would have left a far more definite print, and there would have been no uncertainty about any prints left by him—as there were by Miss Ethel's small feet in her father's shoes. You'll probably find the ball from which she cut the cord on the Coster farm; it's a cord commonly used by the farming community. Of those people who obviously had reason to hate Harton, she was the only one who had access to his rifle. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned! I fancy she tried at first to provoke Farrow into violence against Harton—if we can believe him about the notes he had received, and there is no reason why we should not. And, Sergeant, I should not be surprised if you found that Miss Ethel Coster is a devotee of the adventures of my illustrious master."

While Sergeant Hetherman stood in amazement slowly giving



way to belief, Pons looked at his watch. "I daresay we have just time to catch the 1:50 for London, Sergeant, if you will be so good as to run us back into Haslemere."

"It is really elementary, when you consider the problem," I said, once we were comfortably seated in our compartment on the short run back to Waterloo. "Circumstantial evidence was certainly deceptive in this case."

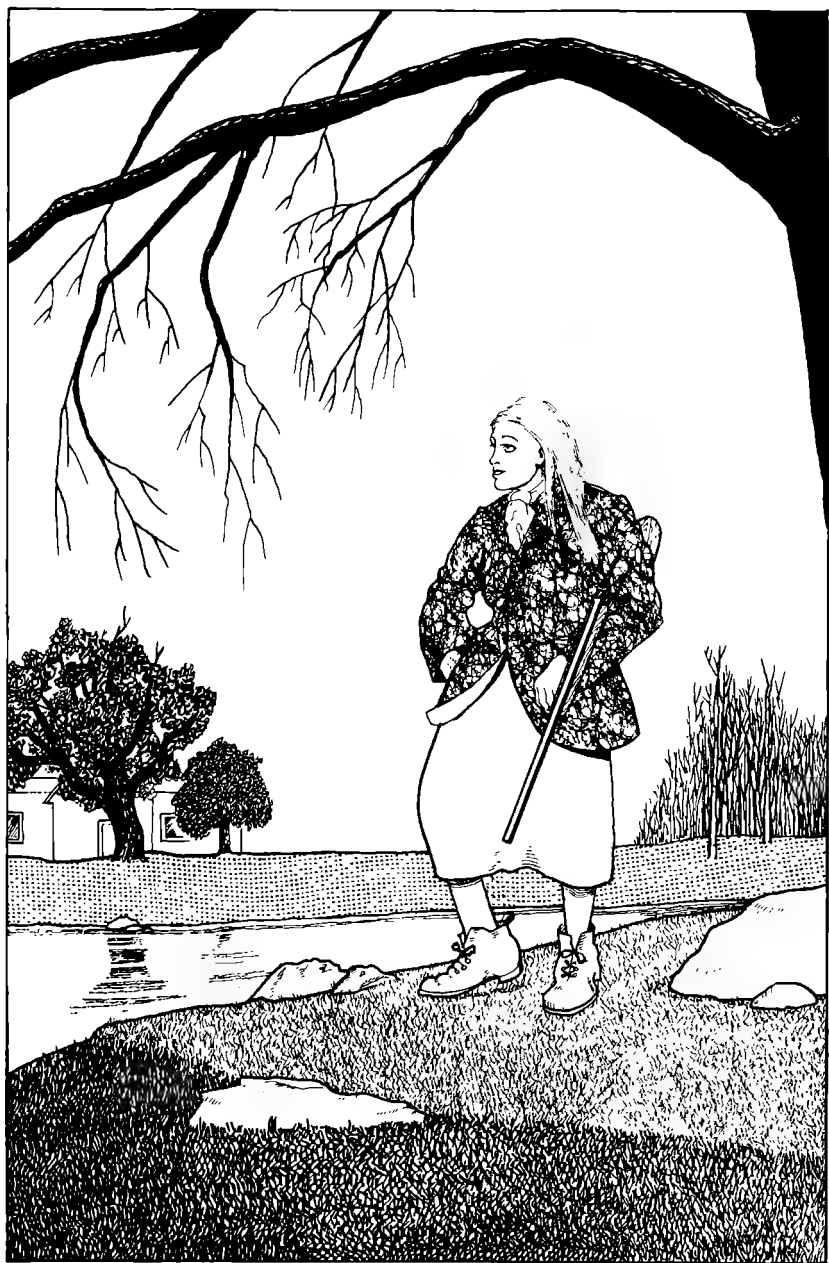
Pons sighed. "My dear fellow, circumstantial evidence is deceptive only to those who have no ability to interpret it properly. Facts are facts, and any unbiased, ordinarily intelligent approach to them cannot fail to read them without error."

"Consider, for example. The cord was cut with scissors—moreover, small scissors, of a type commonly used by women rather than men. A man customarily cuts with a knife, looping the cord and slashing it. While this in itself is hardly conclusive, it struck me at once as most suggestive. Next, the tracks left by the murderer. These were clearly made by a man's shoes, worn by someone with unusually small feet—such as Miss Coster obviously has. But again, this too is highly speculative. Add to it, however, anonymous notes sent to goad Farrow to violence, and you begin to perceive a feminine intelligence in the matter. Let us go on to Harton's unfinished letter. Did nothing about it strike you, Parker?"

"Certainly. It supported the known fact that Farrow had made threats against Harton."

"Dear me," said Pons testily. "I thought it quite the contrary. How did he phrase it? 'Look—aren't you making rather a fool of yourself with all this threatening,' he began. And he went on, 'I've destroyed your notes—because you'd really look a fool if they fell into anybody else's hands. . . .' And then he asks that something of his be sent back to him. Now, my dear Parker, I submit that this is patently not the kind of letter a man sends to another man; no, this letter was clearly being written to a woman. Moreover, it was to a woman who had threatened him—not publicly, but privately, in 'notes,' a woman who has something of Harton's—very likely letters. Who else could this be but his former fiancée, Ethel Coster? Certainly it could not be intended for Farrow."

"Further, when at last I saw the girl, I was more than ever convinced that she was our quarry. She was calm, collected, cool. But she made two little slips, quite apart from the fact that she had manifestly *not* been training her dog at retrieving retriever or no,





every dog can be taught to retrieve after a fashion, and had the dog been so taught, he would have made after the boot when I threw it."

"If she made slips, as you say, they were beyond me," I put in.

"Ah, Parker, you've always had an eye for the ladies—exterior first—and I am considerably more interested in what goes on inside their pretty heads. Miss Coster said that her father had had 'some threatening notes'; who would know this better, since she sent them? Unfortunately for her, when she dropped the cord inside the Kennels after killing him, she did not take time to look at the letter Harton had been writing, or she might have seen her notes mentioned.

"Secondly, she made a curious and tantalizing slip in our conversation at the maize-trough. She said, if you remember, 'You don't seem to have any power over dogs, Mr. Pons. *Perhaps the ladies resist you, too?*' Now, I submit this is *not* the kind of remark one makes casually to someone one has only just met. No, indeed. It came up from deep in Miss Coster's subconscious, for she was very much bound up in the problem of lovers and engagements—particularly broken engagements—and fading hopes of marriage, and in the concealment of that fury of hatred at being thrust aside for another woman which drove her to take the life of the man she had hoped to marry.

"Miss Coster had the strongest motive of all—revenge. When young Ballinger told us that Harton never brought his rifle to the Kennels, the matter was plain as a pikestaff. Where was it, then, but in the Coster home, where Ethel need only walk into his room and take it? She had the opportunity to use it, and she knew just when to do so, for the crime was patently committed by someone who knew the routine of the Kennels. She walked over to the copse, coolly shot Harton, then boldly attempted to make his death look like suicide—borrowing a gambit from Doyle. Thin, true—but it might have taken in someone less observant than Sergeant Hetherman."

"Yes, it is all perfectly clear now," I conceded.

"I daresay this little problem established a sort of record, Parker—though I cannot be certain; you are more fond of these inconsequential details than I—but I cannot recall a puzzle which has consumed less time. Three hours, I make it."

## *The Adventure of the Lost Dutchman*

WHEN I LOOK over my notes concerning the various adventures of my companion, Solar Pons, in the closing years of the 1920s, I am hard put to it to make a choice from a roster which includes the diabolical affair of the Devil's Footprints, the curious puzzle of the hats of M. Henri Dulac, the French Consul, and the singular affair of the Little Hangman, but I doubt that there was another in those years which began as dramatically as the strange adventure of John Paul Renfield, clerk of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd.

The problem had its origin, as I recall, on a bright summer morning. The early sunlight still streamed into our quarters at 7B Praed Street, and Pons, having just finished putting into his files his own notes on the case of the Cloverdale Kennels, had come to the breakfast-table, only a few moments ago laid by our estimable landlady, Mrs. Johnson. He carried *The Times*, and was just turning to the agony column, as was his custom, when there was a sound of running footsteps from the street below, followed by the flinging open of the outer door and a clatter on the stairs.

"A young man in distressing haste," observed Pons, his eyes twinkling. "He has forgotten to close the outer door."

His words were hardly spoken before there was an insistent rapping, and, before either of us could rise from the table, our own door was flung open, and a hatless, disheveled young man bounded into the room, to close the door behind him and to stand there with his back against it, one hand still on the knob.

"Mr. Pons!" he gasped in great distress, "Save me! I've done nothing, but the police are bound to arrest me for the murder!"

"Pray compose yourself, young man," said Pons. "The police are occasionally guilty of gross stupidity, but they are as often capable of extremely able and level-headed work. I observe you have just come from your place of employment, which is not too far from these quarters, and which you yourself opened with your passkey not long ago—the hour lacks but a few minutes of half-past eight. You have been kneeling on a floor—not one which is your responsibility, for you yourself appear to be a singularly neat person, and would not willingly permit such dust to accumulate on any floor within your province—and kneeling quite possibly beside

the body, the discovery of which sent you in such headlong flight to us."

Our young client's jaw dropped, his mouth agape, and in his expression there was that amazement invariably aroused in the untutored at any exhibition of my companion's power of deduction, no matter how simple it was. He took a step or two into the room, and stood there, still trembling a little.

"Sit down, by all means," said Pons persuasively. "Perhaps you would care to join us in a bite of breakfast?"

The young man shook his head almost violently. "I couldn't eat—in truth, I couldn't! My God, sir! do you think you can do anything for me? They'll put it on me, as sure as I stand here!"

"Suppose you tell us your story from the beginning," urged Pons. "I daresay the body will not go off of its own accord."

Thus persuaded, our client dropped into the chair Pons pushed out for him, and sat for a few moments, his face lowered into his hands, until he could catch his breath and control himself. When at last he looked up, his features were more calm; indeed, he was not unhandsome; though his face was round and extremely guileless in its expression, his eyes were a strong blue, his nose and mouth soft, and a sand-coloured moustache was faintly evident on his upper lip.

"Mr. Pons, my name is John Paul Renfield. I live in Highbury," he began. "About a month ago, I found myself unemployed. I had been a clerk in a small shop, which was bought up by a chain, with the result that two of us were dismissed. I turned to the papers to find employment, and almost at once I saw a small notice from a firm called Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd., in the Edgware Road, not very far from here. The firm needed a clerk, and I went round at once to apply. The place had once been a shop, I guessed, but now it had been taken over by this new firm. The gentleman in charge was an elderly man who gave his name as Elwyn Pyncheon; he looked a scholarly sort of man, for he wore pince-nez with heavy brown rims, and he had a bushy brown beard, though I took notice that such hair as I could see coming out from under the skullcap he wore had a more reddish tinge.

"There was not much in the way of furnishings in the office. Just a worn old desk, a wastepaper-basket, a hatrack, and three chairs. Mr. Pyncheon was at the desk when I came in. I introduced myself and said I had come in reply to his advertisement. He looked me over carefully.

" 'Married?' he asks me.

"I said I was not.

" 'Family?' he asks me.

"I said as how I had a mother living in Northumberland, and a brother with her. One sister. My father died in the war.

" 'You haven't got any close friends who'd be likely to drop in and take up your time?'

" 'No, sir, I haven't,' I said.

"He wanted to know what experience I'd had, and I told him I had been clerk for Spotswood & Greenwell for almost seven years.

" 'Ever kept books?'

" 'Yes, sir. I have.'

"Well, Mr. Pons, the short of it was that he decided I was satisfactory, depending on what his partner said. For the time being, I was to consider myself engaged, and would be expected on the stroke of eight in the morning. If, however, I minded long hours, I needn't apply. He explained that the sparseness of the rooms was due to the fact that his partner had ordered special equipment made, but the manufacturer had not yet completed the order, and for the time being we would be required to do our best with such fittings as we now had.

"I went around next morning and there he was, waiting for me.

" 'My dear young man, my partner and I have decided that you are eminently fit for the position we want to fill,' said Mr. Pyncheon. 'You may, however, decide that our hours are too long, but we are prepared to pay you a fair salary to make it up to you. We'll expect you promptly at eight o'clock in the morning, and we won't expect you to leave the premises again until nine o'clock in the evening. Lunch and dinner will be sent in. The premises consist of this room, an adjoining bathroom, and one inner room, which is to be kept locked and which you are on no account to enter.

" 'Whenever ladies or gents come in, take the name and address, such summary of their problem as they may wish to leave, and tell them that whenever an opening presents itself, we will write to them and make an appointment. However, there is one exception to this rule. You will notice as you sit at this desk, which will be yours, a small light bulb over the entrance.' Here he turned me about so that I could see the bulb he meant. 'You'll keep your eye on that bulb, especially during the visit of any client. If at any time you see that it has been lit, you're to make whatever excuse you like to our client, withdraw at once, and leave the building for the remainder of that day, not to return again until the following day.

" 'Now, then,' he finished, 'your first task for today will be to go through the London directory and make a list of all the stores which handle paper supplies.' And with that, Mr. Pons, Mr. Pyncheon put on his hat and left."

Our client would have gone on, had not Pons interrupted him. Pons had finished his breakfast and had left the table to take his favourite easy-chair next to the fireplace, where he sat deeply absorbed in Mr. Renfield's narrative. "I take it, Mr. Renfield," said Pons, "that you are repeating Mr. Pyncheon's words faithfully?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons, just as he spoke to me. When I was a lad, I used to like doing bits on the amateur stage, and I was quite good at it, if I may say so, but of course, not good enough to earn my keep. I did learn to memorize and imitate quite well, but I am telling you what Mr. Pyncheon told me just as he himself spoke to me."

"Very well. Pray forgive my interruption."

"Mr. Pons, for day after day, I sat at that desk, making lists of one kind or another. Now and then clients came in, and I concluded that my employers were in the business of helping people in trouble—not the ordinary kind of trouble, by any means. I always took down names and addresses, and promised that they would hear from Mr. Pyncheon. Occasionally people came in in response to the unusual notices which Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd., inserted in the papers. Here, I've brought some of them in for you."

So saying, our client took some crumpled cuttings from one of his pockets and handed them to Pons.

"Hm!" murmured Pons, reading aloud from them. "'Troubled by investments? See Counsellors Extraordinary.' 'We have acquired the books and papers of the late Jarel Perkins, including maps, notes, documents. Anyone interested, please apply to Counsellors Extraordinary.' 'Genealogical research? Family troubles? In-laws? Only the most difficult cases need apply to Counsellors Extraordinary.' Ah, here is Mr. Perkins again. 'We are experienced in all matters requiring intimate advice.' 'Private papers of Lord Recton. For sale or examination.' Mr. Perkins once more."

"Yes, Mr. Pons, some of the advertisements were repeated."

"Pray continue with your story, Mr. Renfield."

Our client went on. "I worked steadily there at the hours set, and I must say that, apart from the fact that I could not understand quite the reason for making the lists my employers required, I was not ill-used. I was paid weekly at the rate of three pounds a day, which is a better wage than I was accustomed to at Spotswood & Greenwell. My meals were sent in from a nearby restaurant, and I



must say that they were of good quality and quite sufficient for my needs. Once in a while my employer would pick up my accounts of names and addresses, and also the lists I made at his direction, but sometimes whole days would go by without a sign of Mr. Pyncheon. As for the names and addresses, I never heard another word of them from Mr. Pyncheon, though on four or five occasions visitors who had been in during my first week or two came back to complain that they had had no notification of an appointment as yet; I always took down their names and addresses again.

"However, to make this story appropriately shorter, last night, just as I was about to close up, a very rough-looking individual came in. He had one of our advertisements clutched in his hand. He came in somewhat furtively and suspiciously, but he seemed reassured when he saw me sitting in the middle of the well-lit room.

" 'I'll take the lot of them papers,' he said.

"I was about to inquire which papers he had reference to, when I saw, much to my astonishment, that the light above the entranceway was on. I suppose I had become so used to never seeing it after almost a month at work there, that I was the more astonished. Just the same, I remembered my instructions; I rose immediately, as I had been told to do, excused myself, and left the building, no doubt leaving our client to wonder what on earth I was about—unless he thought I had gone after the papers. I went directly home.

"This morning, when I was making ready to come to work, I received a curt note informing me that my services with Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd., were terminated. No reason was given, and I was upset by the ending of what I had come to regard as a soft berth. The matter would have ended there, perhaps, leaving me all in ignorance, if it had not been that I still had on my person the passkey to the premises of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd.; so I determined to go as usual this morning and leave the key on the desk.

"As I came into the building, I was immediately aware of two things. The first was the fact that someone had disturbed the desk, which was much pushed about. A chair had also been turned over. The second was a peculiarly acrid smell, which I took for the smell of gun-smoke. Even so, Mr. Pons, I would have left my key and taken myself off, had I not chanced to see, leading out into the office from under the door of the room I had been forbidden to enter, a dark, glistening stain, which, on walking over to look at it, I saw was blood. Mr. Pons, I then tried the door. It was not locked.

And just beyond it, in an almost empty room, lay the body of our client of last night, sprawled on his face. He had been shot, Mr. Pons. Before he died, he had tried to write something in the dust on the floor with his finger—a word which was meaningless to me, but unfortunately, he could not finish it, because he died before he could do so. There was no sign of my employers.

"Mr. Pons, I knew my duty. The police must be informed. But even as I decided that I must telephone them, I realized I had absolutely no corroboration for what I had to tell them. The note I received this morning was typed on the same machine I had used for the past month. The signature was also in typescript. So far as I could prove, I had been alone in the building when I left the victim; there would be only my word for it that I had left him alive. However much I could say about my employers, I realized that I actually knew nothing of their whereabouts. Mr. Pyncheon had never mentioned his home address, and there was no hint of it among the papers I had handled.

"Mr. Pons, I fear I lost my head. I closed and locked the door once more and came over here as fast as my legs would carry me."

By this time, Pons's eyes were fairly dancing. "Singular, most singular," he muttered. "Counsellors Extraordinary, indeed! What diligence! What unusual tenacity! We shall just look in at their address. Once we have examined the premises, we shall get our old friend, Inspector Jamison, on the wire. I fancy there is no time to be lost. Our quarry already has a night's lead. Come, Parker, bestir yourself. I am at your service, Mr. Renfield."

"Thank heaven! I did not come in vain," cried our client.

"I have yet to turn away anyone who brightens my day with the promise of an adventure," replied Pons as he clapped his deer-stalker on to his head.

The premises occupied by Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd., seemed indeed to have been converted from a small shop. While the place was outwardly neat, it was not prepossessing. No name had been painted on the door or otherwise emblazoned on the building except for a very small business card attached to the outer door; this alone identified the tenant. Our client produced his passkey and threw open the door.

The office was uncommonly barren, and clearly gave evidence of a struggle. Mr. Renfield had described it accurately—the desk had been pushed to one side, a chair had been turned over, and another chair stood well to one side, as if it had been kicked there without

having fallen. The door to the lavatory stood ajar. However, it was the inner room in which Pons was primarily interested, and he walked across to it to open the door, revealing the body of the last client of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd.

It was that of a man past middle age, clad in rough but not cheap clothing. He was grizzled and burly in appearance, thick of body but not fat, a large-boned, well-muscled man who might have given anyone a bad time in an encounter. He lay on his face, his arms sprawled out, and there was sufficient evidence in the dust to indicate that he had been wounded in the centre of the room, but had subsequently crawled toward the door, and, weakened by loss of blood, had attempted to leave a message on the dusty floor. He had been shot twice, once in the right lung, once in the abdomen, and he had been dead, I estimated, almost twelve hours.

The message itself showed in the dust just away from the index finger of the right hand. Pons's eyes fixed upon it at once.

"Is that not most curious, Parker!" he exclaimed.

"Poor fellow! If only he could have finished it!"

"Can you read it?"

I peered at the letters in the dust. "It begins with an 'I,' I think, and goes on with 'a - s - .' Is that another letter after, or does he go on to the next? And that is a 'd,' surely, followed by 'u - t'—what follows may be a 'c' or not; at any rate, at that point he lost consciousness."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons, and went on to examine the room.

The death-chamber was as comparatively barren as the front office. It contained only a cot, on the floor beside which lay a host of cigarette stubs. Pons was already at the bed, examining cot and floor alike, his magnifying glass in his hand. He moved from this corner of the room to another, examining footprints in the dust, picking up a pair of pince-nez with a torn cord, which lay on the floor, and came at last to the dead man, whom he examined as closely as he dared without disturbing the body. He not only went through the empty pockets in vain, but went so far as to scrape grains of earth and particles of dust out of the dead man's trouser turn-ups, and to cut away a portion of the turn-ups themselves and put both into the little envelopes he was accustomed to carrying in the hope of finding some object to analyze in that corner of our quarters given over to his chemical laboratory.

Having finished this, he returned to the outer office, and subjected that room to the same intense scrutiny, often on his hands and knees. It was only when he had finished examining the desk so

recently our client's that he came back at last to the pathetic message which the dying man had attempted to leave in the heavy dust of the inner room. He brought with him a sheet of onion-skin paper from the desk in the outer office, and proceeded to trace the letters carefully without disturbing the dust itself.

This done, Pons was ready to leave.

"Now, then, Mr. Renfield. If you will telephone Inspector Jamison at New Scotland Yard, I fancy the police will soon be here to take your statement and assume control. I daresay your Mr. Pyncheon will not be coming in today."

"I'll just step in next door and make the call, Mr. Pons."

"If you'll give me your address, Mr. Renfield, I will keep you informed of developments."

"Number 31, Moundgrove Road, N. 5, Mr. Pons."

"And you might ask Inspector Jamison to step around to our quarters for a word with me when he finishes here."

Once back at 7B, Pons busied himself at his chemistry. He said nothing of his work while he was absorbed in it. Only when he had completed it did he come over to the mantel, dip into the toe of the slipper affixed to it for a pipeful of shag, and sit down to look at the tracing he had made.

"I daresay you've arrived at some conclusions, Parker," he said finally.

"None but that this is a most unusual affair."

"With a distinct odour of the fraudulent."

"I would not have thought our client was deceiving us."

"No, no, not he," replied Pons impatiently. "Dear me, you have a reprehensible habit of thinking the worst of people, Parker. The circumstances, the circumstances."

"Ah, you mean the spare furnishings of the headquarters of this so-called Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd."

"Capital, Parker! You make progress. Yes, indeed, the furnishings literally scream aloud of the temporary. But is not the business of this unusual firm in itself totally out of the ordinary?"

"Indeed it is."

"So much so that it is difficult to believe in it?"

"Well nigh impossible," I agreed.

"Yet these enterprising employers of our Mr. Renfield seem to have advertised in rather costly space in every paper in London. The cuttings I examined came from no one of them alone. Let me see - did not one of them offer the papers of Lord Recton?"

"I believe so."

"Let us just look into Burke's. I cannot recall such a title; I am inclined to think it is as false as the business advertising the mythical lord's papers."

For a few moments Pons pored over Burke's *Peerage*. Then he looked up with twinkling eyes. "No one of that title is listed here — nor, I daresay, anywhere else."

"Surely that is an idiotic procedure!"

"I submit there is method in it. Consider Mr. Renfield's story. Every client who came was turned away—put off with the promise of being called in for an appointment. He made no mention of anyone having ever been called subsequently. But one client alone excited the curious Mr. Pyncheon's interest—and this one he knew by sight, for, as you will recall, Renfield had not yet discovered the nature of the client's business before he was aware of the light switched on above the entrance. Does not this suggest something to you?"

"Elementary! The room was being watched."

"Right again! It was being watched by the occupant of the inner room. For someone kept a constant vigil from that room. The cigarette stubs indicate a period of long tenancy by a man of substantial weight and medium height, whose footprints indicate that he has rather a small foot—he wears a size eight shoe and has sustained an injury to his right leg, either as the result of an accident or an early sickness, which causes him to walk with his right foot slightly at an angle, perhaps not with a noticeable limp."

"Ah! Mr. Pyncheon's partner," I ventured.

"I fear Mr. Pyncheon's partner does not exist," retorted Pons. "There is every indication that Mr. Pyncheon was alone in the matter. His talk of a partner was only to allay Mr. Renfield's doubts, just as his explanation of the bareness of his 'office' was. There is but one set of prints in the inner room, apart from those of the murdered man. I submit that the whole extraordinary stage was set for the sole purpose of finding someone whom our Mr. Pyncheon wanted very badly to find, and who might be drawn by the nature of the advertising sponsored by Counsellors Extraordinary."

"You are setting yourself an impossible task, Pons."

"It is not as difficult as you think. For one thing, our client's elusive employer is most certainly of comparatively recent American origin. You will have noted that several times Mr. Renfield repeated his words. No Englishman, for example, would say 'stores' when he meant to say 'shops.' That peculiarly offensive diminutive,

'gents,' is another word of which no British professional man is likely to be guilty. Nor is the Englishman accustomed to speak of shops keeping supplies as those which 'handle' them. I have no doubt you observed even more such peculiarities of speech.

"I have also made some little examination of the particles I removed from the dead man's turn-ups, and find it possible to come to certain conclusions regarding him. I subjected the cloth of the turn-ups to close scrutiny and chemical analysis. I found in turn-ups and cloth both, apart from the customary specimens of London grime, tiny fragments of quartzite, stone dust, and—perhaps most suggestive of all—gold dust. Add to that discovery the fact that the murdered man's hands were well callused, and I fancy we are not very wide of the mark if we conclude that the victim was an American miner by calling."

"Why American?" I objected.

"Ah, well, even if the cut of his clothes did not suggest as much to you, it is surely entirely credible that Mr. Pyncheon, an American, sought a fellow American—or was himself the object of such search on the part of his victim."

"I fear I cannot follow you, Pons."

"It is not the first time. Yet the reconstruction of events leaves precious little else in explication. I submit that Mr. Pyncheon and his victim each possessed something the other was most anxious to obtain. Mr. Pyncheon fled to London and set a trap for his victim, who, deceived by the guilelessness of our client, whom we may be sure he observed from outside before he entered the premises of Counsellors Extraordinary, fell into it, lost his life, and perhaps also that possession of his so much desired by Mr. Pyncheon."

"That is all highly speculative, Pons."

"I don't think so. I suggest you look at all the facts. Here is an American setting up a business which is surely fraudulent in that, according to such evidence as we have, no counsel is actually given to anyone. Unknown to his employee, our client, he conceals himself in the back room of the shop and keeps a vigilant watch on every client who enters. When at last he catches sight of his victim, he rids himself of his employee by a prearranged signal, and takes his victim by surprise."

"Now that is as far-fetched as anything I have yet heard from you," I cried. "How would one American find another, hiding from him, somewhere in all London?"

"Why, by dint of advertising. Our American brethren are profound believers in the power of the printed word. Counsellors

Extraordinary, Ltd., ran daily advertisements of a size out of all proportion to the services offered. If his victim were indeed in London, as Mr. Pyncheon had reason to suspect—there is some reason to believe each knew the other would be here—then it was surely within the law of averages that sooner or later his eye would fall upon an advertisement which was directly pertinent to his reason for being here."

"And that reason?" I countered.

"All in good time, Parker. Let us turn now to that enigmatic dying message."

So saying, he placed the tracing he had made on the arm of his chair. I came over and bent above it, looking at it closely.

"There can be no doubt of the first three letters," I said. "They are 'I,' 'a,' and 's.' Then he straggled off to what appears to be a 'd,' followed by a 'u' and a 't.' There was some attempt to write further, but death prevented it."

"Surely that fourth discernible letter is a capital 'D,' " said Pons.

"It might be."

"I submit further that the second letter is an 'o,' not an 'a,' and that there was an attempt to write a fourth letter to precede the capital," continued Pons. "Let us set down the first word as 'Lost.' "

"No, it is surely 'last,' " I protested. "The victim was trying to tell us that it was the last survivor of a group of criminals who murdered him."

"Ah, Parker, you're wasting your talents writing up these tame little adventures of mine. You should be in the department of sinister Orientals and the cosh-and-bag-'em school. What would it be? Last Dutberry—Last Dutwinkle?"

"That next unfinished letter is not 'b,' " I cried in hot protest. "It looks more like a 'c.' "

"So it does. But let us leave this for the nonce. Just hand me that *American Almanac*, Parker."

I gave him the book and sat mutely watching as he turned its pages.

"I fancy the section on mines and mining might prove instructive," he murmured as his eyes traveled rapidly over the pages. "Ah, here we are. Los Amarillas—Goacher's—Bowie Mine—José Vaca's Cave—the Lost Nigger." He lingered to read a page. "Now here is a curious tale, Parker. Let me read it to you. 'In 1865, a band of Apache Indians, wishing to do a service to a military post doctor named Thorne, who had been kind to them, led him blindfolded on a horse into a range of mountains, known by the

Spanish as the Sierra de la Espuma—the Mountains of the Foam—which rise in Arizona just east of what is now the city of Phoenix. When the blindfold was removed, Dr. Thorne found himself at the site of a gold mine so rich that all he had to do was pick gold up from the surface of the earth. He filled two saddlebags with almost six thousand dollars worth of gold ore, and then, blindfolded again, was led out of the mountains, pledged to silence. Six years later, two prospectors named Jacob Waltz and Jacob Weiser, having heard rumors of this mine, went into the mountains in search of it. They had to guide them only a tale the doctor had told of seeing a tall, needle-like crag. This they assumed to be a rock called Weaver's Needle, after a pioneer woman of the Southwest. Some time later, Weiser staggered out of the mountains to die in a Pima Indian village, and bequeathed to the village doctor a rawhide map showing the location of the fabulous mine. The doctor retained it for many years, and at least one copy, subsequently destroyed, was made of it.' "

I conceded that the legend was interesting.

"It is not a legend," said Pons. "It suggests nothing to you?"

"I suppose it is similar to scores of other such tales."

"Jacob Waltz is hardly an English name. Though nothing was ever heard of him again, it was he who gave the name, indirectly, to the mine. Waltz was a Dutchman."

"The Lost Dutchman!" I cried.

"Precisely. I submit it was this that Mr. Pyncheon's victim was trying to write in the dust in the room where he was so foully murdered." He paused and cocked his head a little to one side. "I thought it was surely time for Jamison to come."

The sober tread which had reached Pons's keen ears now fell upon my own, and in a few moments Inspector Jamison opened the door and stepped into the room. The customarily cheerful Inspector looked both wrathful and troubled. He greeted us perfunctorily and immediately voiced his grievance.

"The duty of every Englishman is to report to the police any crime on the instant of its discovery," he said sententiously. "The Yard does not look kindly on the efforts of amateurs to take the place of the police."

"Ah, that is well spoken, Jamison. Doubtless, however, my little interference has not prevented you from solving the case."

"No, it hasn't. We've detained Mr. Renfield, though I don't see why he should have done it. And come back to it, too! No evidence of robbery, and the motive is anything but clear."



"Mr. Renfield is merely the unfortunate dupe of the man, Pyncheon."

"Pyncheon, Pyncheon! That's all I've been hearing. Can Renfield bring forward one other person who has seen him? No, he can't."

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow. You can always find trace of Pyncheon by the regular police methods. Someone must have engaged the shop for conversion to the offices of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd. Someone must have inserted the advertisements and paid for them. I have no doubt that the usual efficiency of the Yard will in due time discover the murder weapon. I fear, however, we shall not have time now to pursue this model routine. We must act more quickly. Just hand me today's *Times*, will you, Jamison?" asked Pons, his eyes twinkling.

Jamison did so, however grudgingly, and sat down, disgruntled and still reproachful. He pushed his bowler back on his head and watched Pons look into the paper.

"Ah, here we are!" cried Pons. "The *S.S. Sheffield* sails from Liverpool for New York in just one hour. There has been no prior sailing for America since the murder, and I should think it highly probable that our Mr. Pyncheon is aboard her. Let us lose no further time. We can fly from Croydon, and, to make things doubly certain, you can wire ahead for the ship to be held until we reach there!"

"Pons, you cannot mean it!" protested Jamison, a wild gleam of hope in his eyes.

"I was never more serious. Come, time does not wait on us."

I pass over that hurried flight to Liverpool.

We reached the city just at the hour the *S.S. Sheffield* was scheduled to sail. We raced in a cab from the landing field to the docks, and were soon mounting the gangplank of the *Sheffield*, the captain and purser of which, duly impressed by the majesty of New Scotland Yard, waited for us. The captain identified us at once and stepped forward to greet us.

"Captain Lacey, at your service, Inspector. What can we do for you?"

Jamison gestured toward Pons.

"Captain, you are likely to have aboard a gentleman of middle age or over, with red or chestnut-red hair," said Pons. "He is clean-shaven and walks in a slightly crab-like fashion due to an impediment in his right leg. He is somewhat above middle height, and

the index and second fingers of his right hand are quite probably stained with nicotine since he is an inveterate cigarette smoker. The bridge of his nose may bear the marks of pince-nez, of which he has no need, but which were part of his disguise and were torn from him in a struggle last night. He has rather small feet, and wears a size eight shoe. The gentleman in question is American, very probably from the Southwestern part of that country."

Captain Lacey turned inquiringly toward his purser.

"We do have a man who answers that description, sir," said the purser.

"Can you make it possible for us to see him?" asked Pons.

"Certainly, sir. Follow me."

We made our way through the throngs of people milling about the deck, following the purser toward the cabins. We had not quite reached his destination, however, when the purser slowed up and paused.

"Here he is now, sir, coming toward us."

A red-haired man, carrying a large Ingersoll watch open in his hand, came walking toward us. The pedal impediment on which Pons had insisted was scarcely noticeable. He was clearly perturbed.

"See here, purser," he said, as he approached. "It's past sailing time. What the devil's the delay?"

"I'm sorry, sir. We're hoisting anchor in five minutes."

The red-haired man snapped his watch shut and turned on his heel. He would have gone back the way he had come, had not Pons spoken.

"If you please, Mr. Perkins."

Perkins whirled about.

"Otherwise known as Pyncheon," continued Pons.

A wild look came into Perkins's eyes.

"Late of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd."

A scream of rage and defiance broke from Perkins, and, just as Jamison pushed forward, saying, "I hold a warrant for your arrest . . .," he broke from us and ran to the rail.

Jamison was too quick for him. Surprisingly agile for his bulk, he flung himself on Perkins before he could throw himself over the rail. But he was not quick enough to prevent Perkins from throwing into the sea something that fell like a heavy cloth.

"The map, Jamison! The map!" cried Pons.

But his warning came too late.

Defiant in Jamison's strong grasp, Perkins shouted savagely, "If I

can't have it, no one else will either!" He flung a similar piece to the deck. "And the one's no good without the other!" He struggled wildly for a moment, to no avail, for the purser and several passengers drawn by the disturbance had gone to Jamison's assistance. "Curse him!" he cried in a voice that rang with despair. "I should have finished Stark when I had the chance."

"You did," said Jamison. "The charge is murder."

Pons bent and retrieved a piece of rawhide on which was drawn half a map of a secret, almost inaccessible spot in the mountains of western Arizona.

"How you could have known it was a map—or half a map—Perkins was after is beyond me," I said when once we were settled in the compartment of the train taking us back to Euston. "And what a lucky shot at his real name!"

"Elementary, Parker, true—but not luck. It could have been none other," said Pons. "It was perfectly clear from the circumstances narrated by our client that the late Mr. Stark possessed something Perkins wanted very much. By the same token, Perkins had something Stark wished to own. Since Stark was obviously connected with gold mining in some capacity, and since he had attempted to write down in the dust in his dying extremity the name of a fabulous lost mine, what more probable but that the object each so ardently desired was half of a map showing the location of the Lost Dutchman?"

"How then to attract Stark's attention, once Perkins had reached London and permitted Stark to know where he had gone with his half of the map? He hit upon a most ingenious device, and then, to make sure that Stark would take the bait, he made it doubly attractive by advertising repeatedly 'the books and papers of the late Jarel Perkins, including maps, notes, documents.' Poor Stark was thrown off his guard, and still more so when he came around for a look at the place, only to see our guileless client in charge before he came face to face with the very man he had thought dead.

"A fetching little problem, Parker," concluded Pons, settling himself for the journey to London. "And its final act was fitting in that the map was rendered useless. Enough blood has already been shed over the Lost Dutchman in the past half century. The lust for gold curses its possessors."

## *The Adventure of the Grice-Paterson Curse*

"NO, PARKER," said my friend Solar Pons suddenly, "you need have no fear that the ants, for all their social organization, are close to taking over mankind."

"The prospect is horrible," I cried—and stopped short. I turned. "But how did you know what I was thinking? Pons, this is uncanny."

"Tut, tut—you are too much given to overstatement. It is only the simplest deduction. You have been reading Mr. H. G. Wells's admirable fantasies. When I observed you just now staring at an ant on the pane with an expression that can only be described as one of horror, it was not too much to conclude that you have at last read 'The Empire of the Ants.' "

"How simple it is, after all!"

"As most seemingly complex matters are simple." He gestured toward the windows. "Draw the curtains, will you, Parker?"

I stepped across the room to shut the elements from sight. Rain whispered steadily at the panes, and from the street came now and then the sound of vehicles splashing through the water, for the warm, late summer rain had been falling the better part of the day, bringing a misty fog to shroud London. It was now twilight, and the yellow glow of lights in windows and along the street could be seen dimly.

"Tell me, Parker, does the name of Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson recall anything to your mind?" asked Pons, as I walked back toward him.

"Nothing but that I seem to remember him as Governor-General of some part of the British Empire. Was it not Malaya?"

"It was indeed."

Pons stretched forth a lean arm, took an envelope off the mantel, and held it out to me. I took it, unfolded the paper inside, and glanced at it.

"From a woman, I see," I said. "She uses a highly individual perfume."

"A musk-like aroma."

" 'Dear Mr. Pons,' " I read. " 'Against the wishes of my family, I

am writing to ask that you receive me tomorrow night at eight on a most urgent matter pertaining to the curse of our unhappy family.' " It was signed, "Edith Grice-Paterson." I looked up. "His daughter?"

"I believe the Colonel's daughter pre-deceased him. His granddaughter, perhaps. What do you make of the postmark?"

I looked at the envelope. Though the stamps were British, the postmark was not; it read "Isle of Uffa," and in its geometrical centre were stamped the initials "G.P."

"Where in the world is Uffa?" I asked.

"Ah, Parker, I fear my geography is lacking in the information you ask. But I seem to remember that on his retirement from Malaya, Grice-Paterson went to live out his life on an island estate which exists in a state of quasi-independence from Great Britain. If memory serves me rightly, it lies off the coast of Cornwall, east of the Scilly Isles. It has a status similar, I believe, to the almost incredible Isle of Redonda, which has been a separate little kingdom, though allied to Great Britain, for decades. Uffa, however, is close to England, whereas Redonda is in the Leeward Islands, in the British West Indies."

"I'm afraid both are beyond my knowledge."

"You have never chanced to encounter them."

I turned again to the letter. "She writes in an agitated hand."

"That is hardly surprising. The papers carried a brief notice within the week of the finding of the body of Lt. Austen Hanwell, described as her fiancé. Certain mysterious circumstances attended his death. Let me see, I believe I cut out the account."

Pons opened one of his huge scrapbooks, which was lying among newspapers on the table. From a group of loose cuttings waiting to be added to the storehouse of criminous occurrences between those covers, he selected one.

"Yes, here we are."

I walked to where he bent and looked past him. The story was indeed brief. "Tragic Death," read the short heading. "The body of Lt. Austen Hanwell, 27, was discovered early yesterday in a study at The Creepers, the home of his fiancée, Miss Edith Grice-Paterson, on the Island of Uffa. He appeared to have been asphyxiated or choked to death, though routine inquiries failed to discover any evidence of foul play. Lt. Hanwell was a native of Brighton. His death is the third in a series of tragedies which have beset the family of the late Col. Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson."

"This seems a most bizarre affair, Pons," I said.

"Is it not, indeed!" agreed Pons. "There is more here than the press is willing to print. Perhaps our client can enlighten us further. I hear a car pulling to a stop below, and, since it is just past the hour set in her letter, I daresay it is she."

In a few moments our client stood before us. She was a tall, willowy young lady, a pronounced blonde, with striking blue eyes. Though she gave evidence of some trepidation, there was an air of grim determination about her also. She was dressed entirely in black, and was enveloped in a full cape, which served both to keep her dry and to protect her from the wind. Once she had thrown back her cape, she had the bearing of a young woman well on her way to spinsterhood, so sombre was her manner.

She ignored the chair Pons held out for her and burst at once into speech. "Mr. Pons, I have no one else to turn to. The police of Helston have declined jurisdiction, on the ground that Uffa has a separate government and that its status in relation to Great Britain has never been clearly defined. That is all nonsense—we are part of England—but they do have certain valid reasons for their reluctance to act. Nevertheless, I am determined to bring to an end the curse which has hung over our house ever since I can remember." Though she spoke with suppressed feeling, there was no mistaking the firmness of her resolve. She paused dramatically before she added, "Mr. Pons, in the past eleven years, three persons have died very strangely under our roof, in circumstances which strongly suggest murder—but, if so, it is murder without meaning and motive, murder which the authorities are reluctant to accept as that."

She strode up and down before the fireplace, clasping and unclasping her fingers in agitation she fought to control.

"Pray compose yourself, my dear lady," said Pons quietly. "You are the granddaughter of the late Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson?"

"I am. I am the mistress of The Creepers."

"The late Colonel had two sons and a daughter?"

Our client drew in her breath for a moment and clenched her hands. "His two sons were the first and second victims of the curse which has fallen on our family, Mr. Pons. My aunt, my father's sister, died when she was quite young. My mother died in an accident at sea. There are left of our entire family now only my two brothers and myself. Both are younger than I, and for the time being, they live with me at The Creepers.

"My grandfather died eleven years ago, and the estate—that is,

the Island of Uffa—fell to his three children. My only aunt and one uncle died without heirs; so the estate came to my father. He in turn died as mysteriously as his brother, and my poor Austen, within a year after he came down from London to assume possession of Uffa. All the children had been living away from the house when my grandfather died; he was a solitary man, very introspective by nature, and with a strong streak of misanthropy. He lived alone but for one servant, and discouraged even his children's visits. His sole occupations were the writing of his memoirs, which were never published, and his devotion to horticultural pursuits. While he made or seemed to make an exception in my case, in that he showed a fondness for me on such occasions as we visited Uffa while my father was employed in London, he was rebelliously rude and cantankerous with everyone else."

Pons sat for a moment in silence, his fingers tented before him, an enigmatic smile on his thin lips. "Will you tell us something of the 'the curse,' I believe you called it?" he asked presently.

"Very well, Mr. Pons, I'll do the best I can," said our visitor. "It began—no, let me say rather that the first time I was aware of it was about a year after grandfather died. I was then seventeen. My grandfather's house had always seemed a very gloomy place to me—for he had surrounded it with all manner of plants and trees, and it was overgrown with creepers, which give the house its name—and we did not visit there often. However, on that occasion—my seventeenth birthday—we journeyed down from London to spend a week with my Uncle Sydney.

"It was at about this time of the year. My uncle was in the best of spirits, though there had never been much love lost among the members of my father's generation, or, for that matter, between my grandfather and his children. On the morning of the second day of our visit to him, my uncle failed to come down to breakfast. When my father and one of the servants went to see what detained him, they found him stretched out on the floor, dead. Mr. Pons, he had been strangled in some remarkable fashion. There were curious bruises around his neck, as well as on his face, his arms, back, and chest. There was the appearance of a violent struggle, but the room was locked, the key was in the lock on the inside, and, while the window was open, there was no mark to show that anyone had climbed into the second-storey window either by ladder or by means of the thick creepers along that wall.

"The medical evidence seemed inconclusive; it was not called

death by strangulation, but death by misadventure; his doctor believed he had had some kind of seizure, and, while a cursory investigation was made by the only police sergeant on the island, there was nothing at all that might be called evidence turned up. No strange craft had landed on Uffa; no one had any reason to want Uncle Sydney dead; and my father, who inherited my uncle's share of Uffa, had far more wealth of his own through his business interests and his investments in the City."

Our client struggled visibly to control herself. She was clearly still under great strain, and had undoubtedly forced herself to make the journey to consult my companion. "Mr. Pons, I didn't see my uncle lying there—but I did see my father in exactly similar circumstances just seven years later, almost to the day—and now, God help us all!—I've seen my fiancé similarly killed—all without motive, as if it were an act of a vengeful God! Mr. Pons, our family—our house—our Uffa is cursed! Now my brothers are urging me to sell, to give up Uffa, and move to England. I have no wish to do so, for I am sentimentally attached to our island, but certainly I cannot sell until I can be sure that only the Grice-Patersons and those who are close to us are victims of this dread curse which seems to know no limitation of time."

"Do I understand you to say that all these deaths have taken place in the same room, Miss Grice-Paterson?" asked Pons.

"No, Mr. Pons. Two of them occurred in the same room on the second floor—my uncle's and my father's. My fiancé was found on the ground floor, in the study directly below that room. He had been reading late, and had apparently fallen asleep. The circumstances of my father's and uncle's deaths were very much the same—that is, the door was locked, the open windows showed no sign of disturbance. In the case of my fiancé, the door was ajar, but nothing had been disturbed. There were the same strangulation marks about his neck. . . ."

"Pons!" I cried out suddenly, memory flooding me—"A dacoit!"

Our client flashed a startled glance in my direction, and then gazed wonderingly back toward Pons.

"Pray forgive Dr. Parker, Miss Grice-Paterson. He is addicted to reading of the exploits of Dr. Fu Manchu, who employs thugs and dacoits to accomplish his lethal work for him."

"You may well make sport of me," I answered hotly, "but it's certainly not beyond the bounds of possibility that the one-time Governor-General of Malaya may have brought back with him some



sacred symbol, the recovery of which has brought about these strange deaths."

"Perhaps not beyond the bounds of possibility, but certainly of probability," countered Pons.

Our client fingered a curiously-wrought golden brooch at her throat, a thoughtful expression on her attractive features. "It is true I've heard my grandfather speak often of the mysteries of Malaya—of the strange customs and the unbelievable things one might learn from the ancient native culture—but I'm quite certain he was not the kind of man who would have made off with anything which did not belong to him. He was no doubt a martinet in many ways, and in most ways a typical British colonial administrator, I am convinced—but, Mr. Pons, he was not a thief."

"I should be inclined to agree with you, since I know something of your grandfather's record," said Pons soothingly, his eyes warning me to be silent. "Now tell me, would it be possible for Dr. Parker and myself to examine the body of Lt. Hanwell?"

Our client bit her lip, and an expression of anguish washed into her face. "Mr. Pons, his body is being taken home to Brighton tomorrow. Do you think it necessary?"

"It may be helpful," replied Pons.

"Very well, then, if we were to leave immediately—my car is below, and there will be a boat waiting to take us to Uffa at Penzance—we might be able to accomplish what you ask before the coffin embarks."

"Capital! We shall leave at once."

Pons leapt to his feet, threw aside his purple dressing-gown, kicked off his slippers, and in a thrice was ready, deerstalker, Inverness and all, having moved with an agility only too typical of him, and managing to chide me for my slowness at the same time. He did not speak to our client again until we were comfortably ensconced in her car, a handsome Rolls-Royce, driven by a chauffeur.

"Tell me, Miss Grice-Paterson, has there ever occurred any other untoward incident at The Creepers?"

In the darkness of the car, our client's sensitive face was visible only in the light of passing street-lamps. She appeared to ponder Pons's question before she answered.

"Mr. Pons, I cannot say. Perhaps in the light of life in an ordinary suburban villa or semi-detached house, there have been

strange events at The Creepers. Our inability to keep dogs, for instance."

"Ah, what of that?"

"They die, Mr. Pons. Despite the fact that our winter temperatures rarely fall below forty-five degrees, and our summer temperatures do not often rise above eighty degrees, our dogs have been unable to weather a year at The Creepers. We have lost no less than seven of them in the course of the past decade. Of all kinds, too. And two cats, I might mention, shared the dogs' inability to live on Uffa."

"Is this a general condition on the island?"

"Well, now that I think of it—it isn't. There is a dog in a tenant house at the other end of the island. An old sheep dog. He doesn't seem to have been troubled by the atmosphere of Uffa. He may be an exception. Then again, it may be the atmosphere of The Creepers, which brings me to another of the incidents you asked about—the night of the perfume—when the entire island seemed to be pervaded with a most bewitching and demoralizing perfume, as cloying as that of heliotrope, and giddyng. It came, of course, from one of my late grandfather's rare plants, which had come into blossom after many years of sterility.

"Then there are, I suppose one might add, the strange, whispering sounds of the leaves, which seem to caress one another even on the most windless nights. Oh, Mr. Pons—how can I speak of these things which are so much a part of the house and of life on Uffa, when I am still stricken by the curse of the Grice-Patersons! How shall I ever again survive the month of August! I shall never spend another summer on Uffa."

She spoke with passion and determination.

"You do not live alone at The Creepers?"

"No, Mr. Pons. My brothers Avery and Richard live there with me. Mrs. Flora Brinton is our cook. Aram Malvaides is an old servant who was my grandfather's orderly for many years. He is the gardener, and he has an assistant who comes some days from the mainland. There are certain other minor servants, responsible to Mrs. Brinton or to Aram."

"You've not mentioned hearing any outcry in the case of any one of the three unfortunate deaths, Miss Grice-Paterson."

"None was heard. The crimes took place late at night, evidently after the victims were asleep."

"Yet there was evidence of struggle in each case?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Does it not seem strange to you that none cried out, that no struggle was overheard?"

"No, Mr. Pons. The Creepers is built in the shape of a T with a short stem. The family usually sleep in the west wing, or the left arm of the T, whereas our guest rooms and winter quarters are in the east wing. There is the entire length of the house to separate the one from the other. Even if there had been an outcry, there's no certainty that it would have been heard by any of us. But there was none, for the servants would surely have heard a cry if one had sounded."

Pons flashed a baffling smile at me and lapsed into silence. Once or twice I caught sight of his hawk-like face in semi-repose, but soon we were out of London, away from the occasional gleams of light, driving through the dark countryside into the southeast.

At dawn we drove across Dartmoor into Cornwall, and soon we were catching glimpses of what is surely one of the most beautiful faces of England—the Cornish coast near Truro, and then Camborne, and then at last, Penzance, where there was indeed a boat awaiting us—it was no less than a small steam-yacht. But of Uffa there was no sign from the shore; our client explained that it lay over the horizon. Her car was garaged in Penzance, since there was little use for it on Uffa, which consisted of but a small settlement in addition to The Creepers and the immediate grounds of the estate, though the entire island was the domain of the Grice-Paterson family, and had been for two centuries.

The morning was free of fog, and presently Uffa rose out of the sea like the embodiment of a dream, like fabled Lyonesse, all green, save for a few rocks along one coast, and for a cluster of white which was the little fishing village on the opposite shore. It was there that we landed. A carriage waited for us, driven by a dour, dark-skinned old man.

"This is Aram, Mr. Pons," said Miss Grice-Paterson.

Aram gazed at us with the darkest suspicion manifest on his features. His attitude was aloof and unfriendly.

"I don't know what my brothers will say," our client went on, as we got into the carriage. "They may be rude; if so, I hope you will forgive them. It is I who am mistress here, and the decision is mine

to make. They've opposed your coming—they fear 'any further scandal'—as they put it."

"We shall see," said Pons imperturbably.

The Grice-Paterson brothers were indeed displeased to the point of rudeness at sight of us. Avery, the older, was but a year younger than his sister; he was a dark-haired brute of a man, as massive as our client was well proportioned, with the shoulders of a professional athlete. Richard was as fair as his brother was dark, and slight of build against Avery's bulk. Neither was entirely civil at our introduction, and neither was co-operative, being disinclined to answer the few questions Pons put.

We did not linger in their company, however, for Pons was anxious to view the body of Lt. Austen Hanwell before its removal. We therefore followed our client from the house through the heavily overgrown lawns and gardens east of the widespread dwelling, past the abandoned dog kennels, to the old stone family vault, where the coffin containing the body lay waiting to be sealed by the authorities before being taken on board ship.

"Forgive me," said Miss Grice-Paterson at the great iron door. "I cannot bear to see him again. I'll wait here beside the path."

The coffin stood just inside. Pons left the door ajar, and so we had ample light at the entranceway to the vault, though Pons had brought his pocket-torch. He lost no time in raising the coffin lid, exposing to view a handsome, moustached face, that of a man who looked even younger than his years. But face and neck—when his clothing was withdrawn—still showed the livid marks our client had described to us.

"Your department, I think, Parker," said Pons, holding his light close to the dead man's skin.

I examined the marks with the greatest care, though I was at a distinct disadvantage in doing so two days past the event. But there was no mistaking what I saw, and, when I had completed my examination, I said so.

"These are the marks of thin but powerful cords, applied with great pressure."

"Enough to cause death?"

"Enough, in my opinion."

"There are no wounds except the marks of the cords?"

"Only on the marks themselves. Here and there small openings in the flesh, which might have been made by rough spots on the cords."

You may laugh at me all you like, Pons, but if this is not the work of dacoits, I shall be very greatly surprised."

For a few moments Pons said nothing. He bent to examine the marks himself. When he straightened up, his aspect was grave as he replied, "I fear it is something far more sinister, my dear fellow, than dacoits. Look again. Are those tears in the flesh not regular punctures?"

I threw up my hands. "It's one and the same thing."

Pons closed the coffin and stood aside for me to pass.

We found our client standing at some little distance from the vault. Beyond her, approaching the place, was a group of four men from the ship in the harbour, preceded by an official who was clearly a member of the police. Miss Grice-Paterson, however, avoided meeting them by stepping down a side path.

"I will take you round to the room where my fiancé was found," she said. And in a moment she indicated the east wall of the building, a towering mass of creepers. "See, those are the windows—those two there. And directly above them are the windows of the other room in which my uncle and my father died."

The windows were framed in singularly beautiful crimson flowers, which adorned the creepers massed upon the stone wall of the house. In the bright morning sunlight, their appearance was remote indeed from the nameless horror which had taken place just beyond them.

Pons paused a moment, crossed over, and smelled a blossom. From the proximity of the windows, where he stood intently examining the earth below, he asked, "Should something happen to you, Miss Grice-Paterson, who will inherit the property?"

"My brother Avery."

"And after him?"

"My brother Richard."

"And then?"

Miss Grice-Paterson looked at Pons, puzzled. "How curious you should ask that, Mr. Pons! Or perhaps you knew of my grandfather's strange will. If some catastrophe were to wipe out our family, the entire estate is to go to old Aram. We have no close relatives. My grandfather had a brother with him in Malaya, but he was killed in an accident there. His only son succumbed to one of those mysterious East Indian diseases, while he, too, worked as a commissioner on my grandfather's staff. I told you," she concluded grimly, "that there is a horrible curse on our family—I assure you most earnestly I was not exaggerating."

"I believe you," answered Pons. "Tell me, if you know—what were your grandfather's relations with his brother and his nephew?"

She shrugged. "I cannot say, except by what I've heard. Grandfather was a hard man. I understand the change came on him after grandmother's death."

"Was she, too, a victim of the curse?"

"Oh, it is all of a piece, Mr. Pons," she cried. "Grandmother was accidentally killed at a family birthday party. Grandfather went to pieces. He brooded for days, and never afterward seemed to come out of his shell except as an irascible old man, filled with hatred of mankind."

"I see. Now let us have a look at the room in which Lt. Hanwell met his death."

Once more we braved the scowls of Avery and Richard Grice-Paterson, as we passed through the front part of the house on our way to the east wing. The room in which Lt. Hanwell had been found was a spacious one, lined with shelves of books on all but one wall, and handsomely apportioned to be as pleasant as possible for anyone who chose to spend his time in it. Our client indicated a comfortable old leather-covered chair between a table-lamp and the near window.

"Austen had apparently been reading there and had fallen asleep. He was found between the chair and the window. The chair had been kicked out of place, and the table moved somewhat out of its usual position. The lamp had fallen over; it was still alight when we found him."

"The window was open?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Our windows are left open in summer because we are never troubled with insects of any kind."

"So that anyone might have entered that way?"

"There was no sign of such entry."

"Nevertheless, it was open."

"But who would have motive for such an act, Mr. Pons?"

"Ah, Miss Grice-Paterson, I am not so bold as to say. But let us suppose it was to someone's interest to prevent your marriage."

"Why?"

"To prevent any change in the line of succession. Or am I mistaken in that your marriage would alter the provisions of your grandfather's will?"

She coloured briefly and looked down. "No, Mr. Pons," she said in a scarcely audible voice. "The property would go to my oldest child."

"As for the absence of signs of entry by way of the windows. . .," began Pons.

"A dacoit could manage it without leaving a trace," I said with asperity.

Pons did not so much as blink an eye in acknowledgment. "Lt. Hanwell slept in the room above?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Mr. Pons. Austen slept in the west wing, where we all sleep. We seldom use the east wing, except in winter, when we move out of the west wing for this."

Pons examined the window and its frame. Then he looked over the chair, studying what appeared to be lines of wear, after which he got down on his hands and knees to look about on the rug, having been assured by our client that it had not been cleaned. He seemed to find nothing there but fragments of drying leaves, which he discarded. Then he went back to the window, opening it and leaning out. By bending down, he could almost have touched the ground, which he had scrutinized outside. The sphinx-like expression on his face told me nothing as he drew back into the room and closed the window.

"And now the room upstairs, if you please," he said.

In a few minutes we stood in a gracious, sunlit bedroom which was the very antithesis of a murder chamber. The room contained a large double bed immediately adjacent to the window; if this were the position of the bed at the time of the death of the two Grice-Patersons, I could not help thinking how immoderately convenient it was for any murderous dacoit. Pons must have been thinking along similar lines, for he crossed at once to the window and leaned out to test the strength of the creepers, the heady perfume of the flowers of which wafted into the room as soon as he opened the window.

"They look as if they would bear the weight of a small man," I could not help saying.

"They would bear an eight-stone man," replied Pons.

"My grandfather planted them when he inherited the estate, just after grandmother's death in Malaya. He was on his first visit home," explained our client. "We naturally thought of someone's climbing them to come in through the window, but there was no mark on them, and the creepers would surely carry some sign of having been climbed, Mr. Pons."

"It is reasonable to assume so—in all but an exceptional case. These windows, too, were open on those lethal dates?"

"I believe so, Mr. Pons. I remember the questions that were asked when my uncle was found. I was seventeen then, as I told you."

"And your brothers?"

"They were sixteen and fourteen."

Pons stood looking about, but there was nothing to be seen, for the room was spotlessly clean. Then he appeared to come to a sudden decision. "Can it be arranged for us to spend the night in this room, Miss Grice-Paterson?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Pons. I had expected to put you into the west wing—but perhaps you would have greater privacy here."

"Thank you. We'll try this room for a night or two."

For the next few hours, Pons wandered through The Creepers, questioning the servants and making a vain attempt to inquire about certain events of the Grice-Paterson brothers, who remained patently unwilling to be of any assistance, a circumstance I regarded with the gravest suspicion, though Pons shrugged it off. He walked about the gardens and lawns, marveling at the variety of exotic plants, shrubs, and trees which abounded there—the fruit of the late Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson's industry. Indeed, so overgrown was the estate that it seemed almost as if the one-time Governor-General of Malaya had sought to create here on this island off the coast of Cornwall a home reproducing, as far as the climate permitted, his residence in the Malay States. Nor was Pons content with the environs of the house; he wandered all over the island, pausing in the little harbour village, quite as if he were on holiday instead of busy at an inquiry into as dreadful a crime as either of us had encountered for a long time.

Our lunch we had eaten alone. Our dinner was taken with the family. This proved to be an extremely uncomfortable meal for all but Pons, for the Grice-Paterson brothers took no pains to conceal their animosity to us. Pons, however, affected not to notice. Now and then he turned to one or the other of them with a question.

"Tell me," he said to Avery on one occasion, "were you aware of the terms of your late grandfather's will?"

"You're fishing for motive, aren't you, Mr. Pons?" answered Avery hostilely. "You should realize, sir, we've had enough scandal without your meddling."

"The question, Mr. Grice-Paterson," insisted Pons, his enthusiasm for the leg of lamb on his plate not at all diminished by Avery's manner.



"Answer him," said our client angrily.

"I was," said Avery sullenly.

And to Richard, later, Pons said, "I cannot escape the impression that neither of you cared very much for Lt. Hanwell."

"Oh, we didn't," answered Richard. "We're solitaries, my brother and I. And you'll find, if you dig deep enough, Mr. Pons, that when I was a boy I could get up and down those creepers like a monkey. Without trace," he added with heavy sarcasm.

Pons thanked him gravely, and continued to show no annoyance when all his other questions were similarly treated by the brothers.

Not until we were once more in the room in the east wing, following that stiff, uncomfortable meal, did Pons relax his insistent casualness.

"Now, then, Parker, have you given up that fancy of yours about the stolen idol and the dacoit?"

"No, Pons, I haven't," I answered firmly. "I can think of no other theory which fits the facts so well. Yet I concede that there is the little matter of the succession—I've failed no more than you to notice that, except for Miss Grice-Paterson's fiancé—and perhaps he, too, indirectly—each of these deaths has furthered the succession of the estate."

"Ah, death always furthers something of the kind," said Pons. "Would that not make the ultimate author of these murders, to your mind, then Aram Malvaides?"

"Who else? Mark this—he alone of all the parties who have an interest in the Grice-Paterson estate was present on the occasion of each murder. The boys were not."

"Ah, that is well reasoned, Parker," admitted Pons.

Thus encouraged, I went on. "If Miss Grice-Paterson had married, there might be still more heirs to dispose of."

"You conceive of his wanting to eliminate everyone who stood between him and the inheritance?"

"Would it not have to be all or none?"

"Indeed it would, if your theory were tenable. But why wait so long between crimes, when he is not growing younger?"

"No one knows the dark mind of the murderer."

"And just how did he manage to gain entry without leaving a clue?" pressed Pons. "Pray spare me that dacoit, Parker. I find it inconceivable that a convenient dacoit would be standing by on call to suit the whims of so reluctant a murderer."

"I have not yet come to any conclusion about his clueless entrance," I was forced to admit.

"I fear that is the flaw in most armchair rationalization--particularly when it is based so largely on romance."

Once again I knew Pons was laughing at me; I was irritated. "No doubt you already know the identity of the murderer?"

"I suspected it before we left London."

"Oh, come, Pons. I am a patient man, but. . . ."

"I never knew a more patient one, to tolerate my idiosyncrasies for so many years," replied Pons handsomely. "But there are several salient factors which, I submit, may have some bearing on the matter. I am no lover of coincidence, though I am willing to concede that it takes place far more often in life than could be justified in fiction. It has not occurred to you that it may be significant that all these deaths should have taken place at approximately the same time of the year?"

"Coincidence."

"I feared you would say as much. The family occupies the east wing only in winter. Why? I have made certain inquiries, and understand that this practise was inaugurated by Sir Ronald; the family only followed his custom. This does not seem meaningful to you?"

I confessed that it did not.

"Very well. I may be in error. Yet I suggest that there may be a connection to certain other curious factors. I fancy we are in agreement that ingress was accomplished through the open window in each case?"

With this I agreed unreservedly.

"It does not seem to you curious, if that is so, that there was no mark to be found on any occasion?—no footprint below the ground-floor window, though there is a respectable area where one might be impressed on the ground there; no abrasion of the creepers to indicate the presence of a climber to this room—nothing?"

"Someone sufficiently light—and trained—could accomplish all that was done without leaving a trace."

"Surely that would be almost insurmountably difficult," protested Pons.

"Richard has admitted that as a boy he did it."

Pons smiled. "Richard was joking."

"You may think so, if you like," I retorted hotly. "But hasn't it occurred to you that these murders may have been started by someone else, and only carried on in this generation by another hand?"

"It has indeed," answered Pons. "Let us for the moment concede that it may be possible for undetected entry to have been made by way of the creepers. Let us look at another aspect of this strange little horror. Why should there be so long an interval from one crime to the next?"

"Obviously to diminish attention."

"If diminishing attention were of importance, surely some less dramatic manner of committing the crime might have been found?"

"Except to one specially trained in the chosen method."

"Ah, we are back once more to the dacoit. I had no conception of the depth of your devotion to the sinister Doctor."

"You're making sport of me, yet I'm in deadly earnest," I said. "Is there any other solution which so admirably fits all the facts?"

"Manifestly."

"What is it?"

"That which was in fact the method and motive for the crimes."

"That is a riddle unworthy of you, Pons."

"Surpassed only by the true solution of the curse of the Grice-Patersons."

"If you're so sure of the solution," I cried, "why are we dawdling here? Why haven't you arrested the murderer?"

"Though I am sure, I want a little more verification than my deduction alone. I am entitled to wait upon events for that verification, just as you are for the dacoit to make a return engagement, for our presence in this room this hot summer night will duplicate the superficial aspects of the situation prior to each of the three crimes which have been committed."

"Except for one," I hastened to point out. "We are not heirs to the estate."

"You have your revolver with you, I notice," Pons went on. "That should be adequate defence against your dacoit. I have asked that the Colonel's old sword be sent up; that, in turn, should serve me long enough to sever any cord which may loop about us."

"Surely you're not expecting another attack!"

"Say, rather, I am hoping for one. We shall hope to catch the murderer in the act."

"Pons, this is absurd. An attack on us would be completely

without motive; it would be a basic flaw in our concept of the motive for this sequence of events."

"Pray permit me to correct you—your concept of the motive, not ours."

"If I were to act, I would have Malvaides under arrest without delay."

Pons smiled grimly. "Yet it is no less logical to suppose that somehow our client's late father killed his brother; that she herself killed her father; that her brother, Avery, likewise developed enough agility to make away with Lt. Hanwell—they, too, were directly or indirectly in line to inherit."

"And now, Parker, it's past the dinner hour; night will soon be upon us. In hot latitudes, people take siestas after lunch; we did not. It is almost hot enough here for the torrid zone, and I for one am going to take a little rest before what I hope will be a strenuous night."

A strenuous night, indeed!

How often since that time have I recalled the singular events of that evening spent in the twice-fatal room of The Creepers on the Island of Uffa! We retired together at a late hour, despite our tiredness, but I was soon drowsily aware that Pons had left our bed and had gone to sit instead in a large, old-fashioned rocking-chair which stood opposite the open window, so that he could face them and still keep an eye on the bed.

Behind him, the door to the room was locked. We had prepared, as he put it, the identical situation which had obtained on the occasions of the two previous murders which had taken place in this room. Had I not been so exhausted after our long night drive and the difficulty of following Pons about during the day, I would not have slept, for the room and the night were cloyingly hot and humid; but the distant roar of the surf was lulling, and I was soon asleep. My last memory was of Pons sitting grimly on guard, the late Sir Ronald's sword ready to hand, even as my revolver lay beneath my pillow, ready for instant firing.

I do not know how many hours I slept before I was awakened, gasping for air, trying to call out, in the grip of a deadly menace. Before I could reach for my revolver—before I was sufficiently awake to grasp what was taking place—I felt myself being drawn bodily from my bed.

I had a horrified glimpse of Pons whipping away with the sword,

even as the life was being squeezed out of me, and I felt a dozen pinpoints of pain upon my throat, my wrists, my face. Briefly, I was aware of a distorted picture, inexplicably terrible, filled with the imminence of death, of Pons's desperation against an enemy I could not see but only feel, of the tightening cords wound so insidiously about me. . . .

Then I swooned.

When I came to, Pons was bending above me, bathing my brow.

"Thank God, Parker!" he cried. "I would never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you in my anxiety to satisfy my suspicions!"

I struggled dazedly to a sitting position. "The murderer?" I gasped, looking vainly for him.

"The murderer—if murderer there was—has been dead these twelve years," answered Pons. "Colonel Sir Ronald Grice-Paterson. Only his unique weapon remains."

Then I saw all around me on the floor the severed, fleshy creepers from the plant with the crimson flowers that covered the east wall of the house, and knew what it was that had sought to clasp me in its lethal embrace, even as it had taken the Grice-Patersons and Lt. Austen Hanwell in their sleep.

"I believe it to be an experience without parallel," said Pons, helping me to my feet. "I had slipped into a doze and woke to a sound from the bed. The creepers had come through the window seeking the prey they sensed lay there—indeed, the entire opening was filled with the waving tendrils and limbs. I shall never forget the sight!"

In the morning, in our compartment of the train making its way from Penzance to London—for Pons would not permit our client to have us driven home, remaining only long enough to assist in the destruction of Sir Ronald's deadly creeper—Pons spoke reflectively of our strange adventure.

"The localized circumstances of the deaths suggested a limited agent from the beginning," he said. "Each death had taken place in a room on the east side of the house—the same side on which the dogs and cats were found dead at various times of summer mornings—and each at the height of summer. 'How shall I ever again survive the month of August!' cried Miss Grice-Paterson. Furthermore, each had taken place at night, while the victims slept,





thus enabling an insidious and silent killer to transfix its victims in a fatal embrace which a waking man would readily have escaped.

"The creeper was unquestionably a mutation developed by Sir Ronald himself, a relative of the upas tree, and, like certain other plants, was carnivorous, becoming especially active at the height of its growth, which was its time of flowering—midsummer. An importation from Malaya, beyond question. Curiously, no one seems to have thought of examining the dead men or animals for loss of blood, for the creeper was, quite literally, vampiric.

"Sir Ronald knew its properties, there can be no doubt. He knew very well why he avoided the east wing in summer, and only the family's habit of following his custom explains their survival. Otherwise they might all have died long before this.

"Sir Ronald's motive in planting and cultivating the creeper on Uffa is obscured by time. Did his misanthropy indeed compel him to lay so effective and mortal a trap for those who succeeded him in the ironic intention that his one-time orderly should come into the estate? Or did his hatred of mankind unbalance him? We have had repeated reference to the old man's dislike of the human race, which included his own family. Perhaps in that lay the root of the evil that was the curse of the Grice-Patersons. It makes an interesting speculation, though we shall never really know."



## *The Adventure of the Dorrington Inheritance*

IT WAS ON a wild winter night of the ninth year I shared with my companion, Solar Pons, at his quarters, 7B Praed Street, that there came to his attention a singular matter which was to have a more profound and lasting effect on me than on him. For to Pons the affair of the Dorrington inheritance was but another in a long sequence of challenging problems, while to me—ah, but that is a different matter, extraneous to this account, which is primarily concerned with the unique talents of the private inquiry agent who did me the honour of suggesting that I share his rooms.

Pons had been more than usually restless that night. Nights of storm and bad weather tended to stir him, as if the wind's rune along Praed Street, and the occasional patter of rain or whisper of snow at the panes were a path to the memory of more exciting times. He was pacing to and fro, filling the room with the fumes of the strong shag he smoked, when there was a pull at the bell below. Pons paused and turned toward the door. In a few moments the outer door could be heard opening and closing, and a step fell upon the stair.

"Our good landlady is coming up with a message," said Pons.

A tap on the door was followed by Mrs. Johnson's troubled face looking in at us. She held an envelope in her hand.

"I do hope this won't take you out on such a night as this, Mr. Pons," she said.

"Thank you, Mrs. Johnson. I am always at the service of those who call upon me. We shall see."

As she withdrew, he tore open the envelope and took a short letter from it. He read it with sparkling eyes and tossed it to me.

"We are about to have a visitor," he said cheerily, rubbing his hands together in anticipation.

The letter was straightforward and direct, simplicity itself.

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"I beg you to see me at half-past eight tonight. My father refuses to take steps for his own protection, as if he feared some scandal. I am convinced that unless such steps are

taken, his life will be forfeit to the scoundrels who are hounding him, but, fortunately, have so far failed of accomplishing this goal. I am, sir, yours sincerely,

"CONSTANCE DORRINGTON."

"What do you make of it, Parker?" asked Pons, as I lowered the letter.

"Well, it is certainly admirably clear," I ventured. "Written by a lady of purpose."

"And quality, for the stationery is expensive."

"Determined."

"Not to be crossed with impunity."

"Refined."

"Of such sensibilities as one would like to see in all women, true—and which one finds, alas! too seldom. She writes a fine, flowing hand, but with a certain restraint; she has an eye to the proper balance—note how well she has arranged her letter on the paper!—and she promises us an intriguing little puzzle on which to sharpen our wits."

"Her father's life threatened," I murmured.

"Ah, more than that, I fancy. There is more here than Miss Dorrington intended to meet the eye. 'As if he feared some scandal.' *Dorrington*. Does not that name ring a familiar chord?"

"None whatsoever."

Pons turned to his voluminous notebooks and went rapidly through them, pausing now and then with the ghost of a smile at his thin lips, or the faintest twinkle in his keen grey eyes as memory of some success was jogged by the passing pages. Finally he paused.

"Ah, here we are," he cried. "'Dorrington, Alexander—Discovered and long part-owner of the Premier Diamond Mine, Kimberley. Owner of the Maracot Diamond.' And so on. He had one son, Amos T., presumably our client's father. He belonged to a great many clubs and societies, and died only three years ago. Evidently Amos T. was his only heir." He closed the book and looked calculatingly at me. "I thought I knew that name. The Maracot takes rank with the Koh-i-noor and the Hope diamonds for size and value. Where there is treasure, Parker, there is also likely to be tribulation." He cocked his head alertly toward the windows. "Was not that the sound of a cab? I daresay our client is at the door."

The ringing of our bell came hard upon his words.

"Rung with decision and determination," murmured Pons. "There is no hesitation there."

Within a few moments, Mrs. Johnson showed into the room a surprisingly beautiful young woman in her mid-twenties. Though she wore a long cape which came almost to her trim ankles and accentuated her height, she had no covering on her head, despite the raw weather, and her thick, lustrous, chestnut brown hair, snow-flecked and touched with raindrops, gleamed and shone in the light of the room. Her eyes seemed both green and blue; her mouth was small in appearance, but full; her cheekbones were high; and her eyebrows had the look of being brushed up, untouched by any shaping instrument, which lent her face the challenging and breathtaking beauty of an aroused madonna's.

She came straight toward Pons and extended one long slender arm.

"Mr. Pons, it's good of you to see me. I am Constance Dorrington. I hope you'll forgive my precipitate coming, but I could withstand my impulse no longer."

"I trust I shall always be at home to a beautiful lady," said Pons, with unaccustomed gallantry. Then, turning to me, he added, "This is my companion and friend, Dr. Lyndon Parker, who—I see by that look of soft and yielding interest—would like even more to be at your service."

She flashed him a charming glance of gentle reproach for thus having brought a touch of colour to my own cheeks as well as to hers.

"Pray sit down, Miss Dorrington," Pons went on. "Dr. Parker, I see, is already waiting on your cape."

The removal of our client's cape disclosed a figure which in every way complemented the beauty of her features. Moreover, she was modestly and inexpensively dressed. Apart from a diamond on her engagement finger, she wore little jewelry—though, truthfully, no gems could have enhanced her appearance.

She sat down in Pons's favourite chair, and, while he stood with one elbow on the crowded mantel, listening, she began with unusual directness to tell her story.

"My father, as you may know, is the only son of the late Alexander Dorrington, who was in the diamond business in South Africa. He left my father a considerable inheritance, but I've

begun to believe that father's inheritance includes something more sinister than the pecuniary rewards of diamond mining. My father has admitted that there was some question about the fairness of the arrangement by which grandfather bought out his partners. To put it as plainly as possible, Mr. Pons, I'm afraid grandfather cheated his partners badly. These gentlemen, who were named Bartholdi and Convers, did make some ineffective protest at that time, but grandfather appears to have had the law—such as it was—on his side. If this is indeed the case, I suggested to my father that he make restitution to the families of his father's partners—Mr. Convers is dead, but Mr. Bartholdi still lives in Kensington—but he will not hear of it."

"You made the suggestion because his life had been threatened?" asked Pons.

"Not alone that, Mr. Pons. Because it seemed to me only honest. I hadn't learned of the matter before."

She opened a small bag she carried and removed three envelopes from it. These she gave to Pons, explaining that they were the warnings her father had received. I stepped to Pons's side and peered over his shoulder.

All had been posted in Kensington. Each was addressed to our client's father by means of a sequence of letters cut from newspapers, crudely pasted together. The letters enclosed were similarly made. The first of them had been sent seven weeks previously. It read simply:

*"Your days are numbered."*

The second, posted three weeks later, read:

*"Grown fat on stolen diamonds! How fat was B. when he died—a pauper? Put your affairs in order."*

The third, posted but a week ago, was in similar vein:

*"Count your days. The Old Man failed honour and justice. We will not fail again."*

Pons read these with tight lips and narrowed eyes. He made no comment, however, other than to signal our client to continue her story.

"When father received the first of these warnings, he was with us."

Pons interrupted her. "You speak of 'us,' Miss Dorrington. You have neither brother nor sister, and your mother is dead."

"Forgive me. My fiancé, Count Carlo di Sepulveda, was with us

at the time. Being Spanish, he is excitable, and he wanted my father to summon the police at once. Father was so reluctant to even consider doing so, that my fiancé was astonished. Then father admitted that grandfather's enemies might still hope to gain a part of his inheritance, and told us about the advantage grandfather had taken of his less educated partners. I suggested at that time that restitution might be made, but both my father and my fiancé agreed that the method of approach selected by these people merited no such consideration, and I suppose, in a way, they were right, for I'm sure father would have listened to any straightforward plea. Besides, we had no way of knowing whether the warnings came from Convers's heirs or from Bartholdi—or from someone close to them who might have learned about the affair.

"When the second letter came, father guessed that Bartholdi or some close associate of Bartholdi, was behind it. He believes that the reference to 'B.' as being dead was meant to misguide him, for it's Mr. Convers who is dead, and it's true that Mr. Convers died in unhappy circumstances. Exactly ten days after this note was received, the first attempt was made on my father's life. He narrowly escaped being shot or bludgeoned to death that evening when he was accosted and held up by two masked men carrying weapons. Only the fortunate arrival of a policeman prevented the success of the ruffians, who had begun to beat father, though he had offered them his wallet and watch. He didn't connect them with the warnings at that time, even though it appeared to be deliberate. It wasn't until he received the third warning, with its reference to not failing 'again,' that he realized an attempt had been made. Even then he wouldn't call the police. Now that the third letter has come, I've grown increasingly fearful for his life, and I cannot simply sit idly by waiting and wondering how they will strike next time.

"I've come here as a compromise between my wish and my father's. You are not the police, Mr. Pons, and I would like you to prevent anything happening to my father. I've thought that if some intermediary could approach Mr. Bartholdi—or the heirs of Mr. Convers—and suggest that restitution for any wrong might be made without the necessity of resorting to violence, father could be persuaded to agree. I have Mr. Bartholdi's address here, but I don't know Mr. Convers's heirs."

Pons hesitated a moment before replying. "I do not usually act

as such an intermediary, Miss Dorrington," he said presently, "but there are points about your problem that interest me."

"You'll act for us, then, Mr. Pons?"

"Say rather, I will act for you, Miss Dorrington. I have no commission from your father. I shall, however, have to meet him. Perhaps tomorrow evening might be convenient?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Perhaps you and Dr. Parker could come to dinner?"

Pons glanced at me, his eyes twinkling. "Dr. Parker would be delighted. As for me—we shall see."

"Seven o'clock then, Mr. Pons," she said, rising.

"Dr. Parker will see you to your cab."

I escorted Miss Dorrington to her cab with pleasure, and returned to find Pons seated in the chair she had just vacated. His long legs were stretched out before him, his chin was sunk to his chest, his lips were pursed, his eyes closed, and the fingers of one hand played with the lobe of an ear. He did not make any sign at my return, and did not, in fact, speak until some time had elapsed.

"If you had a moment, Parker," he said then, "to stray from your admiration for the form and features of our client, did you observe anything of unusual moment about her story?"

I admitted I did not.

"It does not strike you as highly ingenuous?"

I laughed, I fear, somewhat brittlely. "Not half so much as many of the problems you have taken in hand."

"She is a courageous young lady. Engaged to a foreigner, too. We would be happier with more of her kind at home."

"Married to a fishmonger, no doubt, so long as he is an Englishman."

Pons glanced at me with a droll raising of his eyebrows. "Or a doctor—who knows?" he said. "Let us just have a look at the *Almanach de Gotha*."

I gave him the book and waited.

"*Sepulveda*," he murmured presently. "Certainly an old Spanish family, with or without the 'di.' But somewhat more at home in the New World than in the old during the last century or two. The Sepulvedas were among the founding families of Spanish California, and there are still streets, settlements, and byways in Californian cities named in their honour. The Spanish line appears to have all but vanished."

"An American then."

"I know of no such anomaly as a titled American. He is not that. Either he belongs to the last remnants of the Spanish line or he is an American who affects the title to which he has a right when abroad. But his name is less familiar than that other — Bartholdi."

"Was there not a German government officer of that name?"

"Indeed there was, Parker. The name, however, is Swiss."

"Will you call on him with our client's offer?"

"I should be inclined to delay that a little. I submit that I would put myself in an incongruous position indeed were I to make an offer I could not subsequently support. I shall have to talk with Amos Dorrington first." He shook his head. "Just the same, I may stroll about the vicinity of the address Miss Dorrington left with me. In the meantime, let us look once more at those little missives sent to Mr. Dorrington."

I handed these to him and replaced the *Almanach*.

"What do you make of these, Parker?"

"Is there anything to be made of them but what is so clearly set forth?"

"There are certain points of interest," Pons answered. "Do they not seem curiously vague to you?"

"No more so than many of which I have read."

"Ah, in the fiction of detection, no doubt. But this, I remind you, is life."

"Oh, come, Pons, they are simple enough in their meaning."

"I regret to say I do not find them so. The first one, for example, makes no mention whatsoever of the reason why Mr. Dorrington's days should be numbered. If he were willing to make restitution for his father's sins, there is not even a hint that the business of the sale of the diamond mine is the *raison d'être* for the warning. I submit this is a strange approach indeed."

"It was meant to frighten Dorrington into a receptive state of mind."

"One would have thought his father's old associates could have guessed that something of the old man's ruggedness might come down to his son."

"The second warning is indicative enough," I said. "'*Stolen diamonds.*' Could you ask for more?"

"Indeed I could. Is it not singularly odd that Mr. Dorrington should be given time to put his affairs in order?"

"Clearly that is an invitation to make restitution."

"You think so?"

"I am positive of it."

"Pray remember that the late Ambrose Bierce held that to be positive meant to be a fool at the top of one's voice." He shook his head. "To whom, then, ought he to make restitution? No name is signed. There is nothing to show whether it is Bartholdi or Convers's heirs who pursue him. I submit that the invitation is not nearly as simple as you make it out to be."

"And the third?" I asked.

"In this matter the third is somewhat more explicit. The mention of 'B.' in the second note might well have been intentionally misleading. . . ."

"It could not have been anything else."

"On the contrary," retorted Pons, "it could have been a simple error. The mention of the 'Old Man,' the name by which the senior Dorrington was known among his staff at Kimberley, suggests a wider knowledge of the possible motive for this persecution of our client's father. Does it not strike you as curious that *'honour and justice'* can be served only by Dorrington's death?"

"However strange it may seem, that is precisely what the warning does suggest."

"Gently, Parker, gently," said Pons. "I agree. You need not raise your voice to make your point. However, there are other points. The grammar is flawless—yet Dorrington's partners were referred to as 'less educated.' This suggests nothing to you?"

"Nothing but the elementary—that it is not Bartholdi who is behind this, but one of Convers's heirs."

"That is surely the most obvious conclusion," agreed Pons soberly. "I am not quite happy with it at this stage, however. Let us sleep on it. Perhaps tomorrow will bring us new insight."

I did not see Pons again until noon of the next day, for he was up and about long before I rose. He came in to find me at a frugal lunch. His eyes were dancing, and he had about him an air that suggested an ill-kept secret. He wore ordinary clothes, and was obviously going out again for he did not remove his hat.

"I called in to discover whether you were free to come along," he explained.

"By all means," I replied.



"I've been making a few inquiries in Kensington and have managed to trace Convers's son, Adrian. He has a small newsagent's business."

"Ah, you've talked with him?"

Pons shook his head. "I reserved that pleasure for this afternoon. I wanted your help, since I hope to be able to look around a little free of his surveillance."

Since he could scarcely conceal his impatience to be away, I rose from table.

We set out immediately by cab, and in good time found ourselves in Kensington. There Pons walked through the warm winter sunshine toward a little park. He walked with purpose, but presently slowed and drew my attention with an inclination of his head to an old man sitting on a park bench not far ahead of us.

"He has a wide circle of friends among the pigeons of Kensington," murmured Pons.

The old man was even now feeding pigeons. He appeared to be the epitome of amiability. His lined and bearded countenance was benign, and his uncovered white hair caught the sunlight and seemed to make a kind of halo about his head. He was well dressed, almost expensively so; it was evident at a glance that he was not a poor man, and sat there not by necessity but by choice. A silver-headed can lay against the bench at his side.

We drew abreast of him and stopped short of disturbing the pigeons.

Slowly the old man grew aware of us. He raised his leonine head and regarded us out of pale hazel eyes.

"Forgive us if we disturb you," said Pons. "The picture you make among the pigeons is one of such serenity it catches the eye."

The old man smiled, but a certain sharpness seemed to come into his glance. "At my age, young man, nothing disturbs me," he said in a confident voice, "and everything is a part of my world—of which so little is left to me."

"These birds would seem to know you, sir," said Pons.

The old man chuckled. "They should! I've been feeding them for ten years or more."

"Ah, retired," said Pons.

"Long ago," said the old fellow.

Though the food had now been exhausted and devoured, the pigeons showed no inclination to leave the old man. They perched

on his shoulders and knees, sat on his shoes, and walked all about before him as if expecting more largesse from his hand.

"I fancy," said Pons, "these birds would willingly go into your pot if you were of a mind to take them."

The old man's eyes turned suddenly cold. "Sir, the things of this earth were put here for man to enjoy—not to destroy."

Pons apologized handsomely, after which we took our departure.

"Bartholdi," said Pons, once we were out of earshot.

"I thought as much," I answered.

"An amiable fellow, well over eighty years old."

"Such a harmless guise may well conceal a black heart."

"I have known it to do so," said Pons thoughtfully. "However, Mr. Convers is a man of quite another stamp. His shop is only two streets away. We will not go in together, however, Parker. I will go first. You will follow within a few minutes, in just long enough time to enable me to examine what is obvious. I intend to look about a little, and I want him out of the place for a short while, if you can manage it. When you come in, ignore me. Look around for a magazine to buy. When you find it, edge toward the door without paying for it and walk off down the street. Make sure Convers sees you. I want him to pursue you. Delay him as much as you can."

"What if he gives me in charge?" I protested.

"Not Convers. He'll want only his money."

After a short walk, we came within sight of Convers's little shop. Pons bade me wait and went on ahead. The shop was hardly more than a hole in the wall, one of no great depth, with outside racks. I observed that though people stopped at the racks to scan the headlines of newspapers, comparatively few went in to buy.

Presently I followed Pons into the shop. Convers was alone behind the small counter which separated his customers from the shelves of tobacco. He sat on a stool, a short, powerfully built man, roughly clad. He chewed at a match held between his thick lips, and his small, dark eyes, which had been following Pons around, turned frankly to me as I entered. His glance was suspicious, and his face wore a look that indicated a profound distrust of the world.

I thought it best to buy a cigar, before looking over the rack of magazines. Finally I selected the most recent issue of *The Strand*, and, carrying it in plain sight, walked casually over to the door and out.

"Guv'nor!" I heard Convers cry.

I pretended I had not heard and walked rapidly away from the shop down the street.

"You — Guv'nor!" I heard him call out angrily.

Then there was the sound of the stool being kicked over. Three doors past Convers's shop, I paused to look into a display window, keenly aware of Convers's running footsteps.

He came up and took me roughly by one shoulder. "Guv'nor!"

I turned, feigning surprise. "Eh? What is it?" I asked.

"You didn't pay me for the magazine," Convers said belligerently.

"Magazine?"

He pulled *The Strand* almost savagely from my grasp and waved it before my face. "This one! This one! See?" he shouted.

"Upon my soul!" I said. "So I did."

I reached into my pocket.

"You must forgive me," I said apologetically. "I'm a little absent-minded."

He was somewhat mollified. "I could see you wasn't too sharp," he said grudgingly.

I took as much time as I could fumbling about among the coins I had pulled from my pocket before I managed to find the proper amount. He took the money, favoured me with a darkly suspicious glance from narrowed eyes, and turned back toward his shop.

I walked on slowly, until Pons once again fell into step at my side, carrying an ounce of shag he had bought.

"That fellow's a bad man to cross," I said.

"I believe he would be difficult," agreed Pons. "He is not yet sixty, very vigorous, and dourly suspicious."

"You'll remember that little deduction of my own," I said. "I find it extremely gratifying to learn that Mr. Adrian Convers keeps a newsagent's shop. How simple it is for him to have access to the printed letters he would need for the warnings posted to Mr. Dorrington! Or have you overlooked that significant point?"

"Not at all. Indeed, you will be happy to learn that your drawing him out of the shop gave me the opportunity to rummage through a pile of papers beneath his counter. I found these."

He drew from inside his coat three newspaper pages and held them up before me. I saw at a glance that letters and words had been carefully cut out of them.

"Aha!" I cried, with a glance, I fear, of undoubted triumph.

"It would indeed seem to be suggestive," admitted Pons.

" 'Suggestive'!" I cried, not without a touch of scorn. "I should

say it is the strongest possible circumstantial evidence—particularly as the dates seem to correspond on these papers with the approximate time of the posting of at least one of the letters to Mr. Dorrington."

"I have given the matter some thought," replied Pons. "Yet I remain troubled about one or two little details, and I am loath to charge Convers with authorship of this singular persecution until I am settled in mind about him. For one thing, Bartholdi and Convers are in touch with each other, and Bartholdi has access to Convers's counter and newspapers. Access, in fact, is rather public. For another thing, the attack on our client's father bespeaks the hiring of professional thugs."

"Then it could be either Convers or Bartholdi—or both!"

"I fear it could. Yet the studied crudeness of the method does not ring true."

"You have not said they were literate men."

"They are not. But neither are they illiterate. I submit that the method stands in odd contrast to the letters themselves."

"They may have employed someone to prepare the letters."

"Quite true," agreed Pons. "It is also eminently possible that there is a group of them working toward a common end. There are other Convers heirs."

"Have you traced any of them?"

Pons shook his head. "I understand they are as much in need of money as Mr. Adrian Convers."

"A clear motive, then."

"For money, Parker, yes. Not for Dorrington's death." He hailed a cab and we stood waiting for it to swing to the kerb. "I think it is time to have a talk with Mr. Dorrington. We shall look forward to dinner."

We were not destined to share dinner with our client and her father that evening, however. In the late afternoon Miss Dorrington sent frantic word that her father had been run down and gravely injured; moreover, her fiancé had just barely escaped a similar fate. Both men had been pushed into the path of a speeding car, and Count di Sepulveda had also been bludgeoned. Miss Dorrington was close to hysteria, and Pons lost no time setting out for the Park Lane home of our client.

Miss Dorrington herself met us at the door. Though she had been weeping, she was now composed.

"Both father and Carlo are in bed. Carlo is not too badly in-

jured—he was struck on the head by what must have been a sand-bag, but he managed to avoid the car which ran down my father. Both were knocked down, and they failed to take the number of the car. Carlo remembers only that it was a large black Daimler, and that two swarthy men drove it.”

“Where did the attack take place, Miss Dorrington?”

“At the Embankment Gardens, near Charing Cross tube station. My father had made a visit to his solicitor, who is ill at his home. Carlo was with him. As the two of them crossed the street, someone who must have been following them pushed them into the path of a car that came around the corner and raced down the street. Carlo was agile enough to twist away from the car before he fell, but my father fell in its path. But you will want to talk to Carlo.”

“If he can talk comfortably.”

Count Carlo di Sepulveda lay in a double bed in a room at the head of the stairs. He was a pleasant, open-faced young man, not without trace of a certain elegance in his manner, even in his prone position. His head was bandaged over a dressing behind his right ear. At our entrance, his brown eyes widened in surprise.

“You didn’t tell me you had visitors, Constance,” he said in mild reproof.

“This is Mr. Solar Pons, Carlo—Dr. Parker is with him. Mr. Pons has come at my request to look into the persecution to which father has been subjected.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” he said heartily. “We urged him to go to the police weeks ago, Mr. Pons.”

“Miss Dorrington has given me most of the facts,” said Pons. “Can you tell us more? Where, for instance, could your assailant have been concealed?”

“I didn’t see him—or them, Mr. Pons. But an appreciable amount of shrubbery grows at the Embankment Gardens, and I suppose, having followed us, he had hidden himself there and run out upon us as soon as he saw his confederates’ car approaching. There were two men in the car; both seemed to me quite dark, almost foreign-looking. I had the impression, from the brief glimpse of them Mr. Dorrington had, that he recognized them.”

“Ah,” murmured Pons. “Yet they seemed to you foreigners?”

“Either that, or men long exposed to sun.”

“You yourself were struck with a sandbag?”

“I took it to be that.”

“Yet you managed to prevent being flung after Mr. Dorrington?”

"Yes, Mr. Pons. I twisted to one side, since I was aware of the car's approach. I don't think Mr. Dorrington saw it coming until he was pushed. I lost consciousness as I fell."

Pons's keen gaze drifted from the bed and its occupant to look at the appointments of the room. He bent casually and picked up a pair of highly polished shoes, now slightly scratched.

"Your shoes, Count Sepulveda?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"They certainly retain a high degree of polish."

"I stop at Claridge's, Mr. Pons," answered Miss Dorrington's fiancé, with a mild trace of hauteur.

Pons replaced the shoes and went on. "Was there no other traffic at the hour of the accident? Half-past three, I believe, was the time."

"That's correct, Mr. Pons. As bad luck would have it, there was very little traffic at that time. Just the same, the car evidently didn't dare to return so that the driver could make sure of our condition. Pedestrians had seen the accident, though no one has come forward to offer information."

"Did you happen to see any pedestrians other than yourselves as you started to cross the street?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I did. One doesn't think of those things—one tends to one's own affairs, is it not so?"

Pons turned to our client. "Perhaps Dr. Parker might have a glimpse of Mr. Dorrington?"

"By all means," agreed Miss Dorrington. "Dr. Duell has left strict instructions that he is not to be disturbed, but we can go quietly and need not wake him."

Mr. Dorrington lay in the room across the hall, also in a large double bed. There was a nurse in attendance. At a sign from Pons, I stepped up and made a cursory examination of the old man who lay there. He was a stocky, muscular man, just short of being corpulent. Our client watched with some apprehension, and the nurse favoured us with a coldly disapproving stare. The patient was still unconscious, but his breathing was regular, and his pulse only a trifle fast.

In the hall, afterwards, I said, "His condition is grave, but he has a good chance."

"That is just what Dr. Duell said," replied Miss Dorrington.

We descended the stairs. All the way down, Pons was extremely thoughtful and very silent. At the foot of the steps he took hold of

Miss Dorrington's arm firmly but persuasively and drew her close to him.

"I'm sure you are very fond of both your father and your fiancé, Miss Dorrington," he said in a low voice.

"Of course," she replied, mystified.

"I fear I must tell you I expect a final attempt to be made on your father's life tonight."

"Here! In his own house!" She was incredulous.

"In his own room," said Pons. "I took the opportunity to look out of the window. The room is relatively easy of access from outside."

"Mr. Pons, you must be joking."

"I assure you, I have never been more serious. Count Sepulveda himself suggested as much when he said he thought your father had recognized the men in the car which ran him down. If they, too, felt that he did, they have no alternative but to silence him before he can speak."

"Then I'll notify the police at once."

"Stay, not so fast," cautioned Pons. "The police have been known to bungle. Let me suggest that, unknown to anyone, Dr. Parker and I conceal ourselves in the room where your father lies, to spend the night on guard beside him."

"Mr. Pons, I could not ask you. . . ."

"Miss Dorrington, you have retained me to save your father's life. I mean to do so by every avenue at my disposal. I fancy we will not only be able to save his life, but also to net the author of this scheme."

"The night nurse must know."

Pons looked at his watch. "When is she due?"

"At eight."

"Adjure her to silence, Miss Dorrington."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

"Very well. We shall return here at eight—unknown to anyone, mind! Even your father, should he recover consciousness, is not to be told. As long as no announcement of his death has been made, he is in grave danger."

Our client was still hesitant and troubled, but finally she acquiesced. "Very well, Mr. Pons, if that is your wish."

As we left the house, I turned on Pons. "Aren't you subjecting Miss Dorrington to unnecessary worry?" I demanded indignantly.

"I think not."

"How do you deduce that a final attempt will be made on Dorrington?"

"Any other attempt will be too late," said Pons. "You heard Sepulveda say that Dorrington appeared to have recognized the men in the car. Now then—exercise your ingenuity—is it Bartholdi or the Convers heirs behind this persecution?"

I ignored his challenge. "And what, pray tell," I went on, still indignant, "was the point of inquiring about Count Sepulveda's shoes?"

"Ah, forgive me, Parker—I fear I try you. I was interested only in the excellence of their polish, which did not extend to beneath the instep."

"I myself have never worn a pair better polished," I said.

"Ah, you have never stayed at Claridge's, Parker," answered Pons, with a little smile.

"And now?" I asked.

"We shall take the precaution of carrying weapons tonight. You may have the revolver, Parker. I will content myself with my leaded stick. Unless I am much mistaken, we shall have the opportunity of bringing this matter to a successful conclusion before the night is done."

Shortly after eight o'clock, Pons and I were concealed in Amos Dorrington's room. The patient was still unconscious, and the night nurse was rather relieved than not at the presence of a doctor in the room, since it lightened her task, however mystified she was that we were there. The room was quiet, but for some time there was considerable movement in the room across the hall; servants and—I had no doubt—our client herself, came and went at the wish of the patient, who would be up in a day or two, since the nature of his wound did not necessitate our client's fiancé's staying abed.

The night wore on. Pons had set me to watch the windows, but to stay out of line with them, so that I might not be seen against the faint frame of light. He himself had taken his stand behind the door. The room was lit only by a small bedside lamp, which threw a glow over the patient where he lay, but cast a very faint illumination about the rest of the room. Sounds from outside diminished, and gradually the house itself quieted down in sleep.

As the night deepened, Pons sent the nurse on one aimless errand after another—quite as if he actually wished her out of the room—



until I became so indignant that I restrained my protests only with the greatest difficulty. At half-past twelve, Pons urged the nurse to go downstairs to brew us some fresh tea, promising that I would watch over the patient.

She had hardly gone, when there was a quick rustling sound outside the door. I turned expectantly. The door opened, slowly at first, then swiftly, and closed again as someone slipped into the room. Almost at once I was aware of the odour of chloroform as a dark figure moved quickly toward the bed, his intention patent.

Before I could cry out a warning, Pons had crept up behind him. Just as the intruder bent above the patient, Pons raised his leaded stick and struck him down. He crumpled to the floor without a murmur.

"Arouse Miss Dorrington, Parker," said Pons. "I'll stopper that chloroform."

I hastened out.

When I returned with our client, even more attractive in her negligee and gown than in ordinary clothes, Pons stood before the door of the room. He caught hold of Miss Dorrington's hands and looked earnestly into her startled face.

"My dear lady, if you could free your father from the danger which hangs over him with but one diamond," he said, "would you do so?"

"Indeed I would!" she cried passionately.

Pons turned his hand so that Miss Dorrington's left hand rested lightly on his. He touched the diamond on her finger.

"This is the stone, Miss Dorrington. Return it."

So saying, he threw open the door of Amos Dorrington's room, and switched on the light. There, still where he had fallen, lay Count Carlo di Sepulveda.

"I fear I have had to add to the blow he so calculatingly bestowed upon himself," said Pons.

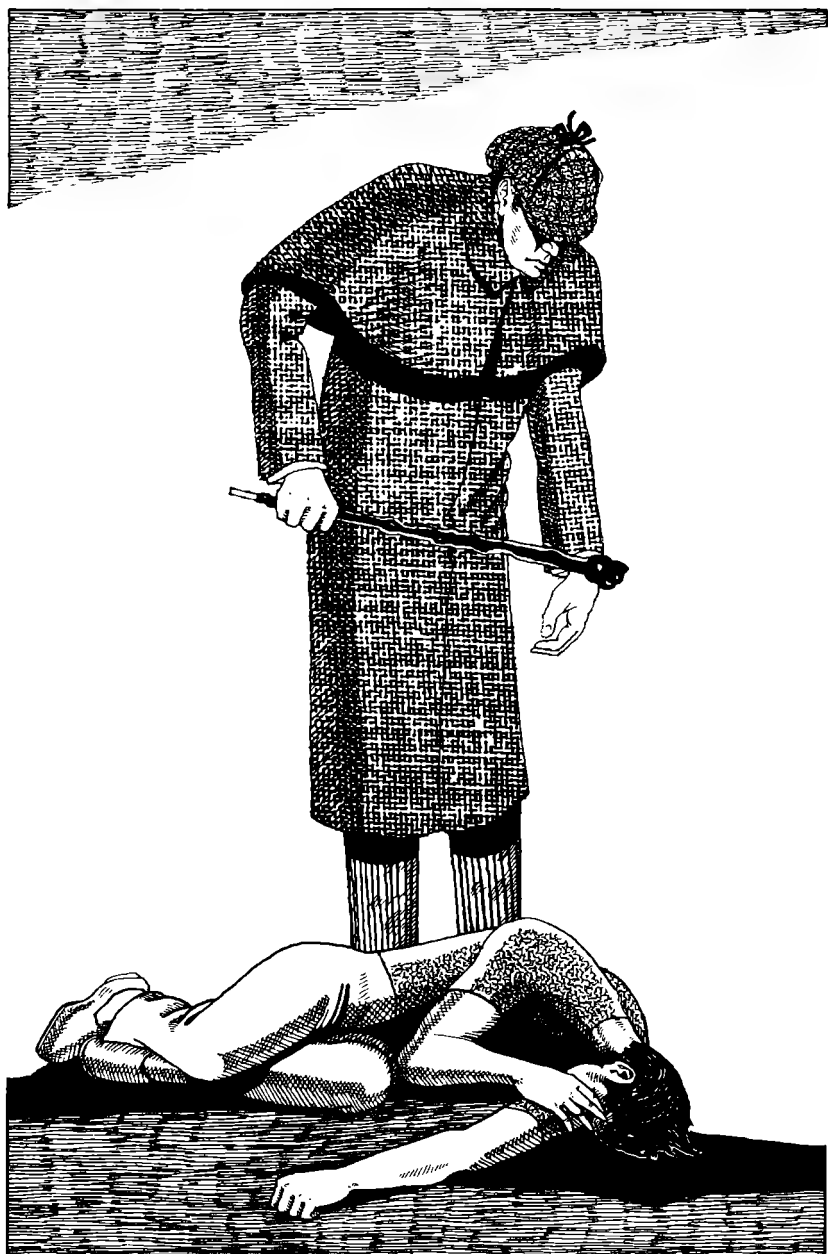
Our client cried out and ran over to him. She came to her knees beside his still form.

"Mr. Pons, you've killed him!"

"I think not."

Then she grew aware of the odour. "Chloroform!" she exclaimed. She shot a glance at Pons, her eyes wide with revulsion and apprehension. "Oh, Mr. Pons—you can't mean . . . ?"

Pons nodded gravely. "I do, Miss Dorrington. The author of all





your troubles and your father's persecution is none other than your fiancé—who is as bogus a count as I have ever had the misfortune to encounter. No one staying at the best hotels could fail to have his footwear as highly polished below the instep as his shoetops.

"There would seem to have been some slight misunderstanding in this little problem, Miss Dorrington. It was by design, but no one coming to your difficulty with an open mind could fail to be aware of it. There was only *one* diamond that was important—that is the stone you are at this moment removing from your finger—since it provided the motive for your fiancé's deeds. The motive was not in seeking to gain part of your father's inheritance, but all your own."

Later, as we stood in the street waiting for a cab, Pons could not forego the chance of scoring over me.

"My dear fellow, the entire matter was as plain as a pikestaff. The crudely done but grammatical warnings were a lesson in developing the power of observation. The first of them was nothing less than a feint; it dredged up more than the rumour which had inspired it. But Sepulveda did not listen closely; in his second note he made the error of referring to Bartholdi as the other deceased member of the trio who once owned the Dorrington mines. His attempt to implicate Mr. Adrian Convers by placing the cut-out papers under his counter was merely fatuous, for neither the Convers heirs nor Bartholdi had any valid reason for waiting so long after Alexander Dorrington's death to press any claim they felt they had.

"In the third warning, Sepulveda gave the game away by referring to the elder Dorrington as the 'Old Man,' which could have been known only to Dorrington's associates or to someone who had sat at the family councils. If we eliminate the former associates and their heirs, only Sepulveda is left with motive and opportunity, however improbable he might seem as the likeliest suspect. Who else but he sat at those councils?

"And who else but he knew of Dorrington's plan to visit his solicitor at his home? Only Sepulveda could have arranged for his accomplices to be ready for Sepulveda's pushing Dorrington ahead of the car, after which he sandbagged himself and disarranged his clothing. Doubtless his accomplices returned quickly enough to mix with the gathering crowd and make off with the telltale weapon. Undoubtedly Dorrington was aware of the identity of his attacker—

but Sepulveda had not counted on the car's failing to kill him; so he had no choice but to attempt to silence Dorrington before the old man could name him.

"A plan compounded by folly. Had he succeeded, Sepulveda would have been at the mercy of the accomplices he had hired for years to come."

He paused just as a cab came toward the kerb.

"By the way, Parker, I submit that even though the bogus Count di Sepulveda has been arrested by the police, our client might very well be in need of just that kind of comfort only a solid man of your stamp could offer her."

"At this hour?" I cried.

"The hour is never too late for gallantry, Parker."

"Do you think so?" I asked, I fear, much too eagerly.

"I do indeed," he said gravely, getting into the cab and giving the driver the address of our quarters. He leaned out in the face of my hesitation and added, "Pray give her my compliments on her dispatch in acting against her father's persecutor. I have a feeling we shall see more of the lady."

Once again time proved my astute companion only too correct in his deduction.

## *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle*

"THE SCIENCE of deduction rests primarily on the faculty of observation," said Solar Pons, looking thoughtfully at me with his keen dark eyes, the ghost of a smile at his thin, firm lips.

"Perhaps you're right," I answered, "but I find that much of my so-called observation arises out of intuition. What do you make of that?"

Pons chuckled. "I don't deny it. We are all intuitive in varying degrees. But for accuracy in conclusions, observation must stand first." He turned and rummaged through the papers scattered on the table beside his chair; from among them he drew an ordinary visiting card, which he tossed over to me. "What does your intuition make of that?"

The card bore an embossed legend: "Mr. Benjamin Harrison Manton," and in one corner, in smaller print, "Norcross Towers." I turned it over. The caller had written on its back, *Will call at three.*

"My observation tells me that the gentleman used a broad-point pen; the character of the writing indicates that he is firm and steady. I see he uses the Roman *e* consistently; my intuition tells me he is an intelligent man."

Pons's smile widened, and he chuckled again.

"What do you make of it?" I asked, somewhat nettled.

"Oh, little more," replied Pons matter-of-factly, "except that the gentleman is an American by birth, but has resided in England for some length of time; he is a man of independent means, and is between thirty-five and thirty-nine years of age. Furthermore, his ancestry is very probably Southern United States, but his parents were undoubtedly members of the American Republican political party."

"You have seen the man!"

"Nonsense!" Pons picked up the card. "Observe: The name *Manton* is more common to the Southern part of the United States than to any other region; undoubtedly it is English in ancestry. In that part of the States, political sentiment is very largely Democratic, but it is not amiss to suggest that Manton's parents

were Republican in sentiment, since they named him after a Republican president."

"Well, that is simple," I admitted.

"Precisely, Parker. But there is no intuition about it. It is mere observation. Now test yourself; tell me how I know he is of independent means."

"He calls at three," I ventured. "Certainly if he were not of independent means he could not break into an afternoon like that."

"He might well get away from his work to visit us," objected Pons. "Examine the card more closely."

"Well, it is embossed; that is a more expensive process than simple printing."

"Good, Parker. Come, you are getting there!"

"And the card itself is of very fine quality, though not pretentious." I held it up against the window. "Imported paper, I see. Italian."

"Excellent!"

"But how do you know he has lived in England for some time?"

"That is most elementary of all. The gentleman has purchased or rented a country place, possibly an abandoned English home, for 'Norcross Towers' is certainly the name of a country-house."

"But his age!" I protested. "How can you know the man's age merely by glancing at his calling card?"

"That is really absurdly simple, Parker. In the States it is considered fashionable even today to name children after the president in office at the time of the child's birth; doubtless the American tendency to hero-worship plays its part in that, too. Harrison was president from 1889 to 1893; hence it follows that our man was born in one of the four years of Harrison's term. The age is more likely to be thirty-nine years, because the tendency to name children in such fashion is strongest during the inaugural period."

I threw up my hands. "The contest is yours!"

Pons smiled. "Well, here it is three o'clock, and I should not be surprised if our client is at the door."

As he spoke, there was a steady ring at the doorbell and, after the usual preliminary of shuffling feet on the stairs, Mrs. Johnson finally ushered into our rooms a youngish, black-haired man, whose smooth-shaven face was partly concealed by large, horn-rimmed glasses with dark lenses. He was clothed in the best fashion, and as he stood before us, leaning on his stick, he held in his hand a

motoring cap, indicating he had come some distance—possibly from his country place.

Our visitor looked from one to the other of us, but, before Mrs. Johnson had closed the door behind her, he had fixed his gaze on Pons, and it was to him he now addressed himself.

"You are Mr. Solar Pons?" he asked in a low, well-modulated voice.

Pons nodded. "Please be seated, Mr. Manton."

"Thank you." With simple dignity our visitor seated himself and immediately threw a dubious glance in my direction.

"My friend, Dr. Parker," said Pons. "Anything you say is eminently safe with him."

Manton nodded to me and gave his attention again to Pons. "The matter about which I have come to consult you is one of disturbing mystery. I don't know that anything criminal is at its root, and I cannot afford to have any word of it leak out."

"You have our confidence," Pons assured him.

Manton nodded abstractedly, and for a few moments he was silent, as if trying to decide where to begin. Finally, however, he looked up frankly, and began to speak. "The matter concerns my country estate, Norcross Towers, which fell into my hands a little over six months ago. I might say that it was purchased to please my wife, who had lived there before I married her, and is again mistress of her old home. I have been very fortunate in business, and I am able to keep both town and country houses; but since I am usually kept in the city, I don't often have time to join my wife at Norcross Towers.

"However, a month ago I drove to the Towers for a short holiday. Though the estate had been in my possession for some months, I had not yet had time to go over it thoroughly, and this I now set about to do. One of the first places to attract my attention was the fens, which had claimed the life of my wife's first husband."

Pons, who had been sitting with closed eyes, looked suddenly at our visitor. "Are the fens on your estate called 'Mac's Fens'?"

Manton nodded. "They were named after my wife's first husband—by the natives in that country."

"Then your wife was Lady McFallon."

"I married her six months after her husband's tragic death."

"Scott McFallon was the man who with one servant and his hounds set off across the fens near his home and sank in a bog. His



servant, I understand, pointed out the exact spot where he went down."

Manton nodded again. "Yes, that is quite right."

"Go on with your story, Mr. Manton."

"The fens," Manton resumed, "are quite large and, in common with most fens, almost entirely marshland, with a few scattered patches of firm ground. On this considerable tract of land stand the ruins of a very old building at one time used as an abbey. It is of stone, and one wing of the place has a kind of intactness. I had taken it into my head to examine this ruin, and I started out alone for it one afternoon in my car; I had had a road built to wind through the fens to the village of Acton, to reach which previously it had always been necessary to make a wide detour. The new road was open to the public, of course.

"As I drove toward the ruin, it occurred to me that I had forgotten to instruct my secretary about a business matter of some importance; so I decided to drive straight on to Acton and telephone him, examining the ruin on my return. But dusk had already fallen when I returned, and I had no intention of prowling about the building with pocket-torch. Just as I was approaching my home, a car came speeding past me, going in the direction of Acton. I thought nothing of it then, for it was possible that someone was taking this convenient short cut to the village, though it is not often used."

"You made a note of the car?"

"Not definitely. It was a large touring-car—a Daimler, I thought; but I could not be sure. However, I did see three people in the car, for I noticed this especially because one of them seemed to be ill."

"What gave you that impression?"

"He was sitting in the rear seat with a companion, and was almost completely covered with rugs and coats. As I flashed by, it seemed to me that his companion was trying to soothe him."

Pons nodded, and indicated that Manton was to continue.

"I speedily forgot this incident, and went into the house for dinner. Throughout the meal, I observed that my wife ate very little, and I became alarmed at the thought that something troubled her. I had noticed something like this before—a certain uneasiness and nervousness—but had put it down to some passing physical disorder. I could now see, however, that she was deliberately trying to appear normal, and eat dinner as if she were perfectly herself. This is unusual for my wife; she is a remarkably straightforward woman, and illness in the past has always caused

her to refrain from taking heavy meals. I asked her whether she felt ill, and whether I could do anything, but she denied that she was ill, and only redoubled her efforts to appear at her ease.

"I tried to forget this incident, and retired to my study, where my wife shortly followed me. Now, Mr. Pons, my study overlooks the moor, and is in a direct line with the ruin. I was sitting directly opposite a low window facing the ruin when I closed my book at about ten o'clock. Judge my surprise, gentlemen, to see in this ruin two lights, one of which was put out even as I looked. Presently the other began to move, going from one room to another, according to its appearance, among those which were left intact in the wing still standing. Then it, too, was put out.

"My wife, meanwhile, had caught my look, and since she sat opposite me and could not see the lights, she asked what I saw. 'There's someone in the ruin,' I said.

"I caught an exclamation from her, and then in some confusion she said, 'Oh, I forgot to tell you, but I rented the abbey for two months.'

"I was astonished, but I recovered quickly enough, and asked to whom she had rented it. There was quite a pause before she replied, with some apprehension, that she had rented it to a professor of psychiatry who had brought a lunatic and his keeper out there for the purpose of isolated observation of his patient. Though I had been somewhat upset at first, I now recalled the car which had passed me on my homeward way that evening, and I assumed at once that the sick man was none other than the psychiatrist's patient. I could not forebear suggesting to my wife that she might first have consulted me, whereupon she seemed hurt and said that we could put them out. Of course, I would not hear of it.

" 'I'd like to have a talk with the professor, though,' I said.

" 'I wouldn't disturb them, Benjamin,' she answered.

" 'Oh, I don't suppose there's any harm in going out there. After all, it's our property and they're our tenants temporarily.'

" 'But there's no need to disturb them, Benjamin,' my wife insisted.

"I could not help feeling that for some reason unknown to me my wife did not want me to go to the ruin, but as I said no more, the matter was closed for the time being. Shortly afterward, I went to bed. My wife usually stays up quite late, reading and embroidering, and I thought nothing of her staying up that night.

"Sometime during the night, I was awakened by the sound of

tapping on glass somewhere about the house. I am a very light sleeper, and I sat up in bed to listen. I heard a window open downstairs. I looked at my watch; it was a quarter of twelve. Then I remembered that in all probability my wife was still in the study. I called down to her from my doorway, and Anna answered at once. Reassured, I returned to bed.

"Next day, my wife asked for a thousand pounds. Though it means little to me as money, this sum rather staggered me, and I was naturally curious to know what Anna wanted with so large a cheque. She evaded all my questions with banter, but I believed I would most likely learn to whom Anna signed over the cheque; so I gave it to her. When the cheque came back a month later, I discovered that Anna had cashed it at my bank, and that in consequence I knew nothing of where the money might have gone.

"Last night another chapter in this curious puzzle took place. As before, I was awakened close to midnight by the sound of tapping on a window, but this time I slipped from the room into the hall just after the window was opened. I went down the stairs as the window was closed again. Below me, I could see my wife's shadow, cast by the lamplight in the room, and distorted by the firelight from the hearth. To me it seemed that she was reading something, but my thoughts were interrupted by a low moan from her. At the same instant I saw her fall to the floor. She fell toward the fireplace, and I ran to her assistance.

"She had fainted. As I bent forward, I caught sight of what she had been reading; it had fallen from her hand into the fire, and was now almost entirely consumed. Nevertheless, I snatched it, put out the fire with my hands, and on the corner of paper as yet untouched by the flames, I read: *five thousand pounds at once . . . what will happen if . . .* —disconnected certainly, but enough to assure me that my wife was an unwilling party to some conspiracy. I thought immediately of the thousand pounds of the previous month, and of the ruin on the fens, which I feel instinctively is connected with the mystery in some fashion. The inhabitants of the ruin have never been seen; by day there is no sign of life about the place.

"My wife, meanwhile, was coming around, and as she regained consciousness, she looked toward the fireplace; this made me determine to say nothing about the note, for I felt that if she wanted me to know about it, she would speak. She did not. I could think only that some diabolical circumstances were keeping her

from confiding in me. There can be no question of doubtful conduct on her part; I know that as only a husband can know that. I have had countless proofs of her devotion to me, and I hope I have given her all reason to feel that I love her fully as much.

"This morning, Mr. Pons, my wife asked for five thousand pounds. I quibbled a little, but in the end I handed over the money. Then I came directly to the city and poured out my story to Lord Crichton, who advised me to come to you as a man of the utmost discretion. I left my card on my first visit. Now that you have heard my story, perhaps you could come to visit us—say as friends of mine in the trade—and see what you can make of the matter at close range."

Manton leaned back and watched Pons.

"The matter certainly has points of interest," mused Pons. "I see no reason to forego it."

"Can you come with me at once?"

"I believe we can. But first, a few questions."

"Go right ahead, Mr. Pons."

"I am under the impression that before her first marriage, your wife was the young society girl, Anna Renfield. Has it occurred to you that she is being blackmailed for some past error?"

"It has," replied Manton gravely. "But unless I have been grossly deceived, Anna was held up as an example of all that is best in a young lady."

Pons nodded, and appeared to reflect for a moment. "You say you married Lady McFallon six months after the tragic death of her husband. Were you aware of the financial condition of the late Scott McFallon?"

Our visitor nodded. "When I came to England seven years ago, and came to know the lady who is now my wife, I learned that her husband's affairs were in a bad way, and that it had become necessary to sell Norcross Towers."

"You were not then aware that other factors entered into McFallon's weak financial condition at the time of his death?"

"Such as what?" asked Manton bluntly.

"His lack of honesty with friends and patrons to the extent of causing many of them to lose heavily because of certain ill-advised—if not criminal—activities?"

Manton shook his head. "I knew nothing of it."

"Perhaps it has so happened that some group of persons has discovered or manufactured evidence to show complicity between

McFallon and his wife, and perhaps this is the nature of the blackmailing attempts."

Manton sprang from his chair in extreme agitation. "I can't consider such a suggestion, Mr. Pons," he said sharply. "I cannot for a moment believe that Anna was in any way a party to any of McFallon's schemes. If you come to Norcross Towers with that idea, Mr. Pons—" He shook his head violently. "No, it's better to drop the matter at once. Anna's past is spotless; if McFallon was guilty of dishonest or criminal acts, then she knew nothing of it, believe me. You cannot think it."

"You forget that I am only suggesting possibilities, and it's entirely possible that forged evidence would cause her to fall a ready victim, fearing that connection with scandal, however ill-founded, might reflect upon your name or your business."

Manton looked down at Pons, a light breaking over his features. "Mr. Pons, I believe you have hit it!" he exclaimed. "That must be the reason she didn't want to tell me—for fear of injuring my position—for she knew nothing could ever come between us."

"I am not at all sure that my supposition is correct," objected Pons. "I merely consider possibilities. There are more to examine."

Pons reached for the telephone and called Scotland Yard. I heard an answering voice which, from my place close to Pons, I recognized as Inspector Jamison's. Pons asked for information concerning Scott McFallon, and we sat in silence while Pons waited until Jamison had given him the data he wanted.

He turned from the instrument smiling cryptically. "Apparently death was an escape for McFallon. The day before the bog claimed him, an order for his arrest was signed. He would be in prison today if he had come alive from the fens."

"Good God, Mr. Pons!" exclaimed Manton. "My wife must never know that—she can't have suspected anything bad of McFallon."

Pons nodded and rose to dress for the long ride before us.

Norcross Towers was a large rambling structure, a typical English country-house, not far from the highroad, which connected with the road Manton had had constructed across the fens to Acton. The two-storey building was surmounted at the rear by twin turret-like towers, from which the estate no doubt derived its name. The house was of old grey stone, made extremely attractive by great masses of ivy that flung its vines far up along the old walls. As we came up

the flagstone walk toward the house, I noticed that all the windows within range were set very low, close to the ground.

Mrs. Manton was the type of woman most often described as ash-blond. Her features were thin, well formed, and her body was very lithe. She had lost neither the dignity of bearing nor the singular beauty which had helped to make her a leading member of society before her marriage. We met the lady in Manton's study, where we were introduced under our own names as brokers, for Pons considered it unlikely that Mrs. Manton would recognize either of us.

It was dusk when we arrived at Norcross Towers, and the first duty before us was dinner, over which we spent an hour, chatting about stocks and bonds, a subject about which Pons knew much more than I had given him credit for, and, for the benefit of the lady, the news of the day. However, Pons and I excused ourselves immediately after dinner and retired to our room on the ground floor, where Pons had insisted it be, for he planned on some nocturnal reconnoitering, and had no wish to be forced to descend the stairs each time he wanted to prowls about.

In our room, Pons gave a sigh of relief. He changed into an old shooting outfit, complete with a rifle, and stepped out of the low window to the adjoining terrace. I watched him make his way over the lawns to the road leading across the fens, and saw him at last trudging away down the road. I settled myself to read and await his return.

But it was after midnight when Pons came back, and I was dozing in my chair, book in my lap, when he slipped into the room. I awoke with a start to see him standing before me, removing his shooting jacket, and regarding me with a tolerant smile.

"You examined the ruin, I suppose?" I guessed.

Pons nodded. "There's certainly some kind of patient there. The fellow is in an improvised bed, and if I'm not mistaken, he won't last long; he is quite wasted by disease. He looks sixty, but cannot be much over forty."

"And his keeper?"

"A burly fellow, but never a countryman. I daresay I should not be wrong in asserting that he is not unfamiliar with Limehouse or Wapping. The patient's doctor is there, too—a great hulk of a man, who shows some traces of culture. He is well dressed, wears pince-nez on a gold chain, and has fascinating—that is to say, hypnotic—eyes. There is nothing definite to be said about him, save

that under pressure, he might well become a very ugly customer. I should not like to cultivate his acquaintance.

"All in all, it has the appearance of what it is meant to be: a case of experimentation on the health, mental or physical, of the patient, though he seemed to protest his imprisonment. Unfortunately, I could hear nothing of the conversation, for the room was tightly shut—they are occupying but one room, incidentally—and the three spoke in low voices. It's entirely possible that we may be assuming too much in suggesting a connection between the trio and the unknown blackmailers, but there is something very suspicious about them. I have the feeling I have seen the three before, but I'm hanged if I can place them at the moment."

"They must be in it," I put in. "I see no reason for this kind of treatment of a patient, lunatic or not. The man is exposed to consumption in this atmosphere; it is perfectly ridiculous."

"Consumption!" exclaimed Pons. "Yes, the patient out there strikes me as a consumptive; if he is, then his doctor is no more a physician than I am, and the patient's presence there is vitally necessary to the blackmail plot. It may be that the patient is the directing genius, but that is unlikely, for he would not endanger his life by staying out there." He shrugged. "Ah, well, let us just sleep on it."

The next day Pons drew Manton aside. "Do you think it possible for me to have a few words with the servant who accompanied McFallon on the day of his death?"

"Why, the fellow has been dead for years. He had a stroke two days after his master was drawn under by the mire out there," said Manton.

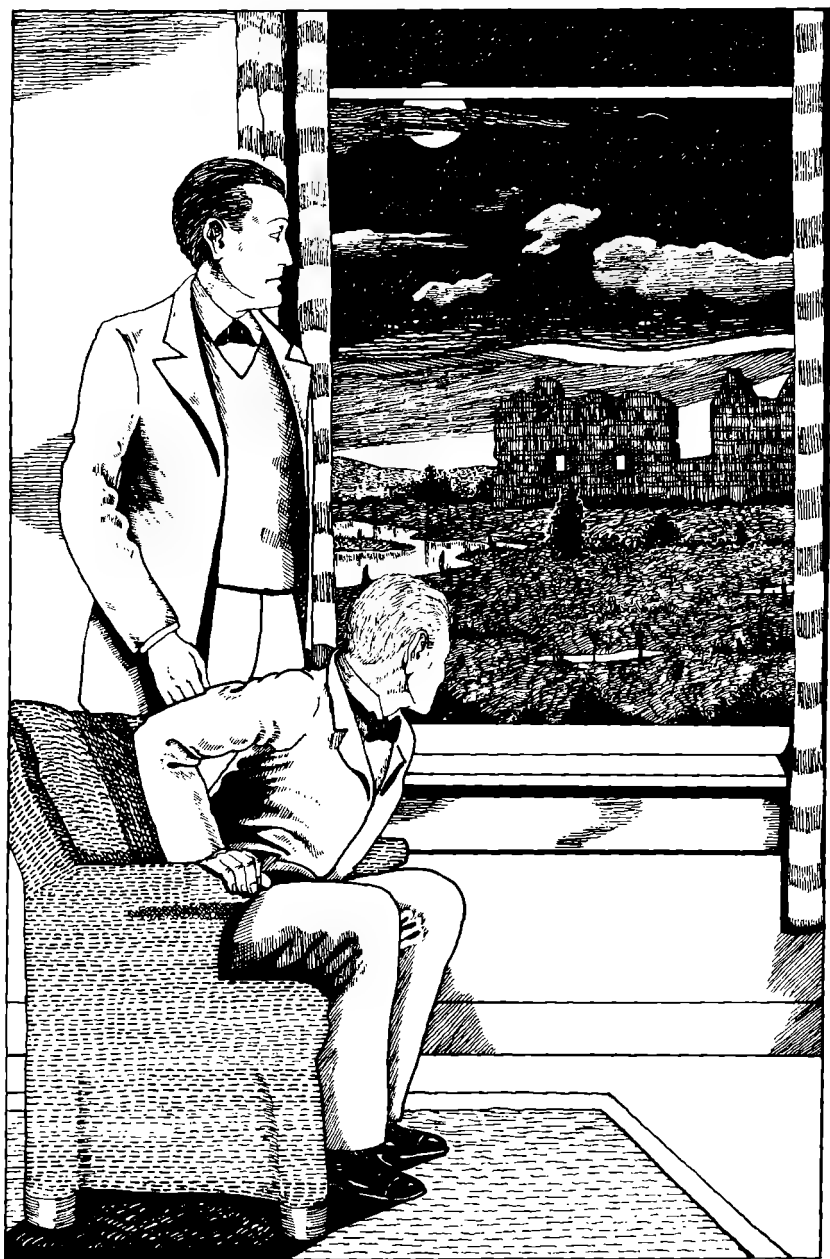
For a moment Pons stood as if petrified, his eyes fixed on our host in open astonishment, his pipe hung loosely from his mouth. Then he clapped his hand to his head and exclaimed, "What a fool I have been!"

Without a further word, he astounded Manton and me by stepping from the study window and vanishing into the mists of early evening in the direction of the ruin on the fens.

"Do you think he has discovered something?" asked Manton guardedly.

"Unless I'm greatly mistaken, he has. Pons displays every sign of being off on a strong and perhaps conclusive trail!"

Pons's face on his return was jubilant. His easy grace had







returned, and his attentions were all for Mrs. Manton. He managed to seat himself next to her at the table that night, and he chatted with her amiably throughout the meal. It was as she was rising to retire that Pons bent to assist her, and muttered into her ear five words, which, however lightly they were said, I managed to overhear.

"He died tonight of consumption."

I think Mrs. Manton would have fallen, had not Pons been at her side. Manton, however, noticed nothing; for her recovery was instant, and there now passed between our hostess and Pons a glance of understanding which had our host as its object.

Sometime after Mrs. Manton had left us, Pons turned to Manton and said quietly, "I think your charming wife will no longer be bothered by the rascals out there on the fens."

"You've cleared up the matter, then?" asked Manton eagerly.

"I have."

"In heaven's name, what could they have held over Anna?"

"Forgery, my dear sir. And what an elaborate forgery!"

"Poor Anna!"

"But they will be well on their way to the coast by now," continued Pons.

"What!" cried Manton, springing to his feet. "You didn't let them off?"

"In the circumstances, I thought it best," said Pons calmly. "The rascals would be certain to drag up the scandal of McFallon's questionable activities, with which they are thoroughly familiar."

Manton nodded glumly.

"But sit down, my dear sir, and let me tell you the clever story the fellows had forged to deceive your wife."

Manton sat down expectantly.

"Two blackmailers, familiar with McFallon's history, met a young man whose resemblance to your wife's first husband was very remarkable. These two persuaded this third man to fall in with their plan and impersonate McFallon in order to blackmail the present Mrs. Manton. Their plan was this: they were to go to Mrs. Manton with the clever story that her first husband had not been lost in the bog, but had fled to the Continent to escape the consequences of his stock juggling—'certain unpleasant circumstances,' they told your wife. Now these fellows were supposed to have encountered McFallon on the Continent, persuaded him to return to England with them some time ago, and forced him to reveal his

presence to his wife through his writing, carefully copied from the real McFallon's. Then the blackmailing was to begin, to rise from small sums to larger and ever larger sums, forcing the lady to give and give under fear of the exposure of her first husband's presence here on the fens, and the scandal of a bigamous marriage.

"How long this might have kept up, it is difficult to say; for all went well for them at the beginning over a month ago. Your wife believed their fantastic story, and fell prey to them. Unfortunately for the villains, the fellow they had chosen to play the part of McFallon was a consumptive. The damp air of the fens brought about a quick collapse in his constitution, and only tonight he died and was buried in the bog. The rascals are gone, and my advice to you, Mr. Manton, is to say no word of the affair to your wife. She will soon know that her trouble is over, and she will feel better if you know nothing of it." He sighed. "And now let us get to bed, for I should like to be in London early tomorrow."

"What a curious tale," I said, when we were once more alone in our room, "and yet, in a way, very clever. The idea of having McFallon vanish with the servant as accomplice is perfectly logical in the circumstances of McFallon's imminent arrest; his supposed stay on the Continent and his meeting with those rascals when he could no longer return to England because his wife had remarried after the unexpected death of his accomplice prohibited her from knowing the true state of affairs; those fellows forcing him to aid them, for he was noble enough to keep away all these years and now fell victim to them—why, every step is perfectly logical!" I exclaimed in admiration.

I stopped suddenly and looked at Pons, whose face looked grey and gaunt in the dimmed light of the room. "Why, Pons!" I cried. "It was true!"

"Every word of it!" Pons nodded. "Except that McFallon killed himself rather than be instrumental in his wife's suffering. He rests now in the bog, and no one will ever know he has not been there all these years!"

"Good God! And you let those scoundrels get away?"

Pons turned his inscrutable eyes on me. "I had all I could do to keep my hands from their throats—but there are better ways of handling these matters. I sent a wire to Jamison before lunch; they'll be taken at Dover."

## *The Adventure of the Late Mr. Faversham*

WHEN I LOOK over my notes on the cases that engaged Solar Pons's attention during the decade begun in 1919, I find many amazing adventures whose details ought to be placed before the public. There were in that time, for instance, the perplexing affair of the Mumbles, known to the public for many months as the Swansea Mystery; the curious interlude of the Sotheby Salesman, who was found dead in an empty house; the adventure of the Black Cardinal, that unbelievable conspiracy which threatened to undermine the Papacy and overthrow half the governments of Europe. But few of the problems of that decade so fascinated me as the affair of the late Mr. Faversham.

The facts of the case were utterly baffling when Pons first read of it in the *Daily Mail*, where it appeared under the head: "Amazing Mystery in Strand." I saw his eyes gleam, and I observed that he read the account twice before he turned to me.

"Now here's a pretty mystery, Parker," he chuckled. "Professor F. V. Faversham of Merk College, has walked into his house and disappeared."

"Of course there's some mistake in the report."

Pons shook his head thoughtfully. "That seems hardly likely at first glance. The word *into* is in black type, and while the matter is treated rather lightly, the fact remains that Faversham's disappearance into his house is unmistakably emphasized."

"No doubt there are any number of ways he might have got out."

"It does not seem so. Observe: the house was boarded up during the extent of the professor's six months' leave; his front door, the only entrance not so treated, was under observation. Faversham had returned to London from Scotland and was to spend a five-day interval in London before completing his vacation in Germany."

"Aha!" I laughed. "Secret passages!"

Pons smiled. "Perhaps we shall walk over in that direction this evening."

"It will certainly do no harm. But I daresay the matter is much more simple than the papers would have it."

"That is quite possible, Parker," returned Pons. "But at least this

gentleman, Mr. Faversham, has done us a favour in so radically departing from precedent as to walk *into* his house and vanish. So many persons walk out of their houses and are never seen again; the occurrence is so common that it seldom attracts my attention, unless, of course, its salient features are so strange that I cannot help feeling drawn toward the matter."

"His name is familiar to me," I said presently. "It occurs to me that I have seen it in connection with Lincoln's Inn Fields—a barrister, I believe."

"So? Then doubtless he holds classes in law at Merk College."

He said nothing more, and apparently the matter of the lost Mr. Faversham was relegated to the past, for Pons did not again touch upon his suggestion of walking to the house in Slade Street that evening.

But our attention was shortly recalled to the case of Mr. Faversham, for an hour afterward, there was a sharp ring at the bell, and in a few moments Mrs. Johnson ushered two elderly gentlemen into the room. I recognized one of them immediately as Dr. Joseph Dunnel, President of Merk College. He took precedence over his companion and bowed to Pons, introducing himself, and then his companion, Dr. Hanley Fessenden, likewise of Merk College.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said Pons.

"Thank you," replied Dr. Dunnel gravely, nervously fingering his sideburns. "We've come to consult you professionally about a matter deeply concerning our college—a very delicate matter, Mr. Pons."

"Indeed?" Correctly interpreting their glance in my direction, he introduced me, and almost instantly diverted their attention from me by observing that if they insisted upon walking, they might better have made a diversion up Portland Place and along Marylebone Road to Praed Street, rather than going more directly along Oxford Street where major road excavations were taking place. The dust on their trousers clearly indicated the basis for Pons's deduction, which served his purpose in bringing their attention back to him. Pons leaned back, bringing his fingertips together, and waited, suggestively.

Dr. Dunnel coughed. "You may have seen the account of the disappearance of Professor Faversham, of our faculty?"

"Walked into his house and vanished," said Pons, reaching again for the paper he had only a little while before put to one side.

Dr. Dunnel nodded. "Then you know the primary facts of the matter. Professor Faversham has always been a man of the most upright character, Mr. Pons; he is highly respected at the college, with a reputation for extraordinary wit and a very pleasant personality. His life has always been very regular, and therefore his strange disappearance is all the more amazing. We cannot help but suspect foul play."

"You have someone in mind, perhaps, gentlemen?"

"No one," answered Dunnel.

"Then obviously you have some specific reason for believing that someone has made away with Professor Faversham. May I know it?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. It is this. Professor Faversham is our treasurer; for the last year he has had complete charge of ten thousand pounds of our money. Five days ago Professor Faversham returned to London from a three months' vacation in Scotland; he is on six months' leave at present. On his return, he saw fit to draw our money from the bank. We did not question his motive, confident that his action would be to our ultimate benefit."

"When was the money drawn out?"

"Yesterday morning, Mr. Pons. It was to have been returned today, for Professor Faversham was to leave for Berlin tomorrow morning to complete his leave of absence."

"He notified you that he was drawing out the money?"

"Certainly. Everything was done in the proper order."

"How many people knew of the transaction?" asked Pons, after a momentary hesitation.

"I fear you will gain nothing in that direction, Mr. Pons. I admit that we were rather indiscreet about the matter, and it came out; virtually all the tutors and lecturers in the college knew of it. And then there are, of course, the bank officials."

Pons contemplated his pipe thoughtfully. "You asked no questions of Professor Faversham?"

"None. We suggested as a matter of course that he give us some clue to his intention, but he did not do so."

"Surely that is an unusual, not to say irregular, procedure?"

"Oh, most irregular, Mr. Pons, admittedly. But we have done it before, and we have never lost anything through any of Professor Faversham's transactions. He has a good eye for investments, and in every case previous to this time, his investment has proved a very good thing."

"As a barrister, Mr. Faversham may have known prominent

people in other fields—brokers, perhaps. Is there any possibility that he might have invested your money in stocks?"

Dr. Dunnel looked uneasy; his austere features coloured a little. He glanced at his companion before he admitted at last that it had been suggested that Professor Faversham might have dabbled in the market.

His statement was reserved almost to coolness. Pons said nothing for a moment, but a keen look came into his eyes. "Did Professor Faversham spend his London interlude at his home in Slade Street, or at a hotel?"

"That we cannot say. He spent a part of each day at his home; but it is equally certain that he did not spend his nights there."

"Do you know whether he at any time entertained visitors at his home?"

"We know of one man, Mr. Pons, of whom he spoke to us. Dr. Hans von Ruda, a professor retired from the University of Bonn."

"You saw them together?"

"We saw von Ruda enter Faversham's home. My own home is just across the street from number 27."

Pons sat for a few moments, his eyes contemplative. "I take it you want me to find Professor Faversham and the ten thousand pounds," he said presently.

"Quite so, Mr. Pons. We would not like the members of the college board to know that we had been in the practise of following so irregular a procedure in regard to our funds. Dr. Fessenden and I are making this our personal concern, and you will have *carte blanche*—we will cover all your expenses in addition to your fee."

"Very well, gentlemen, I will take the matter up."

Pons had hardly bowed the two professors from our lodgings before we were on the street ourselves. He hailed a cab at once, and in a few moments we passed our recent visitors walking slowly in the direction of the college. We drove rapidly along Edgware Road, but were halted for a short time at Marble Arch by the increasing traffic along Bayswater Road and Oxford Street. In considerably less than half an hour, however, we drew up before number 27 Slade Street, from the steps of which came a young constable whom I recognized as Mecker, with whom Pons had previously worked. He came down the path to meet us as we crossed from the curb.

"Common sort of house, isn't it, Mecker?" observed Pons in greeting, looking at the ordinary, one-storey stuccoed residence that faced us.

"Like most of the others on this street, Mr. Pons. This one was built by Faversham about three years ago."

"All boarded up, just as the papers had it."

"Yes, for the length of Faversham's leave. A good job, too. He couldn't possibly have got out by any passage but this front door." His intelligent young face clouded in perplexity.

"And he's not in the house?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Pons. We searched it from top to bottom. No tunnels, no secret passages, nothing. We *did* look, on the theory that we can't afford to neglect any openings, no matter how improbable."

"Dear me!" said Pons with a thin smile. "If Faversham isn't in the house, and couldn't have got out any other way than this front door—then he must have come out the front."

"And that's just what he did not do."

"No?"

"No! Professor von Ruda swears that the door was not lost to his sight for a moment. Not only that, but from the time he gave up Faversham as lost, I was here at the door."

"That is most singular. How did it come about?"

"Von Ruda had been visiting Faversham. When he got ready to leave, Faversham kindly offered to walk to the Strand with him, and to wait there with him until an omnibus came. The two men came out on to the front steps. It was a frightfully foggy and wet night, and Faversham went back into the house to get his raincoat. Von Ruda remained standing on the stoop, waiting for Faversham to return. When he tired at last, he went into the house and directly down the short hall to the alcove where he knew Faversham kept his mackintosh.

"The coat was there, but the professor was not. All this time he had the front door in sight. When von Ruda could not find the professor, he called him and finally came back to the stoop. I was passing and, hearing his calls, I came up the walk where von Ruda discovered me and related the incident. I instructed him to wait, which he did, and called Inspector Jamison. The door was therefore not out of our sight for so much as a moment."

Pons gazed reflectively at Mecker, taking out his pipe now and filling it. "You admit that the fellow simply couldn't have vanished into air?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. But where did he go? We've ransacked the house even to the extent of digging up the basement floor."



"Well, one of two solutions presents itself. Faversham either went out of this door, or he did not."

"I give you my word that he did not go out of it," said Mecker.

"Then you may take my word that he never went in."

Mecker looked sharply at Pons. "But von Ruda insists that he did. He saw him."

"What about von Ruda?"

"Retired from Bonn in 1921. As far as we know, he has a perfect record. He lectured in philosophy, with part time in law and logic; he has a string of degrees that would put the alphabet to shame. We wired the university immediately."

"Von Ruda is being held, I take it?"

"Jamison insisted on it. He's in a temper by this time, to my way of thinking. He's booked to sail tomorrow, and as it looks now, he won't get away until we find some clue to Faversham's disappearance."

Pons chuckled. "Full marks for Jamison; he has had the good sense to see that there is a serious flaw somewhere in this fabrication, and he's taking no chance of allowing his star witness to escape!"

Mecker threw open the front door, and we found ourselves gazing down a short hall, at the far end of which was the alcove where a raincoat hung in plain sight. Pons stood briefly on the threshold; then he strode rapidly down to the alcove, where he turned and looked speculatively at us.

"He certainly could not miss seeing the door, could he?" he remarked dryly. "Did von Ruda explain why he didn't go through the house?"

"Faversham was using only his library, where he had put up a cot for the nights he meant to be in London, since he didn't want to open a bedroom. The door immediately to the right of this front entrance leads directly into his library, and Faversham was not there when von Ruda looked into it as he came back to the front steps."

"And the other doors? What about them?"

"All locked, Mr. Pons. I tried them at once before I called Jamison."

Pons nodded and came briskly toward the library door. "Well, then, let us just have a look at the library."

The library was a low, dimly lit room. Mecker turned on the lights as we entered, and revealed that every wall, to the jambs of the doors and the one window, was lined with high shelves, and

every shelf filled with books. In the centre of the room stood an old-fashioned desk-table. On it were a few scattered papers and two books—one closed, with a projecting slip of paper to mark a place, the other turned face down at a point to which Faversham must have got when von Ruda came to visit him. Against the shelves to the left of the table was a cot, which gave evidence of having recently been slept in, for the sheets were partly thrown back and rumpled.

Pons went directly to the bed and came to his knees the better to examine it. He pulled back the sheets gingerly, and spent some moments scrutinizing the impression in the bed. That he had discovered something when he rose, I saw at a glance, but I forebore to question him, knowing that if his discovery should ultimately fit into the pattern of his solution, he would reveal it in good time. Then he went to the library table and proceeded to examine the books and papers on it. One paper he passed over to Mecker; it was Professor Faversham's passport, dated for the following day.

Pons next gave his attention to the books on the shelves, passing from one shelf to another and drawing books from their places to leaf through them. He crossed and re-crossed the room, and finally returned to his starting point. Contrary to our expectations, he did not stop his examination of the books, but started all over, taking each book as he came to it, skipping only those he remembered having looked into before.

"You might take Parker over the house, Mecker," he said, turning to the constable. "It will take me some time to finish here."

Mecker agreed reluctantly.

When we returned to the library, we found Pons engrossed in a volume of German prose written, as the printing on its cover gave evidence, by Dr. Hans von Ruda. He looked up at our entrance.

"Will you want to look over the rest of the house, Mr. Pons?" asked Mecker.

"I think not. My little examination has been most valuable, and I doubt whether anything found in the other rooms could contribute much more. I'm taking this book with me, by the way. It's a text on philosophy by Dr. von Ruda, a presentation copy from the author to Faversham—a gift, I take it, since the inscription is Christmas, 1921."

"Was it on the shelves?"

"No—in one of the drawers of the desk."

We left the house, Mecker walking down the path with us. At the

pavement, Mecker asked, "Have you any suggestion that might help us, Mr. Pons?"

"I might suggest only that you examine the books in the library. It may lead you to something. Then, you might look into the drawers, if you have not already done so. By the way, you've looked up the hotel at which Dr. von Ruda stayed?"

"Of course. It is the Adelphi."

"Indeed! Well, I may call them." Pons half turned, then hesitated. "And, Mecker, you might give that bed a closer scrutiny. You'll find, I think, that it's been slept in only once; it looks rather as if it had been used with the intention of giving that impression. Faversham, however, has been in London five days. Dr. Dunnel, who lives just across the street in that white, railed-in house, informs me that Faversham did not spend his nights here."

"What do you make of it?"

"I think it would be wise to discover where Faversham spent his nights, eh, Mecker?"

"Yes, it might be," agreed Mecker, now deeply puzzled.

"When are you relieved here?"

"At seven-thirty this evening. Then I report to the station before being released for the night."

"Well, if it is not too inconvenient, try to get over to 7 Praed Street before midnight. I may have something for you."

It was already dark when we ascended to our lodgings in Praed Street. Under the green-shaded table-lamp in our study, Pons took the German book from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Take a look at it, Parker. It's rather interesting."

I took the book and began to examine it, while he occupied himself on the telephone. The book was bound in black cloth, and the printing on its cover was large. The gold-leaf lettering of the title read, *Die Philosophie*. It was a ponderous volume of some nine hundred pages. The title page was inscribed: *Mit Freundlichen Gruss, Hans von Ruda—Weinachten, 1921*. The text was printed in large type and easy to read, though the pages were uncommonly thin. I turned the book over and over in my hands, and leafed through it in the hope of discovering what Pons seemed to have found. But when he turned from the telephone at last I knew no more than when he had handed me the book.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Pons.

"At first glance, I'd say the book was little used," I ventured.

"Elementary—but still of some significance in view of the fact

that von Ruda and Faversham are warm friends, and since Faversham has had the book since 1921, with ample time to go through it. Yet several pages are still uncut. You noticed nothing else?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"No matter. I'll come back to the book later." He put the book away. "You went through the house, Parker. What did you see?"

"Enough to assure me that Faversham couldn't have got out of any window or either back or side door; everything is securely boarded up, and no one could go through without leaving telltale marks. There are none. Moreover, Mecker systematically tapped the walls. There just isn't room in the small proportions of the building for anything in the nature of a secret passage—but that would impute a criminal motive to Faversham himself, rather than to some outsider."

Pons shrugged. "Not necessarily. But I hardly expected to discover any secret passages."

"Well, there's certainly a flaw somewhere—the professor simply didn't walk into his house and vanish."

"Well, that is the story, Parker," said Pons, chuckling. "But perhaps the flaw is not in the story. We shall see. I have just called the police and asked to have Professor von Ruda sent up with Mecker when he comes. Until then, let us forget about the matter."

We had not long to wait, for in something like two hours the bell rang. The ringing of the bell was followed by Mecker, who trailed in his wake a shabby, bent old man, who bore all the obvious earmarks of a professor. He was not thin, yet his features gave the impression of being wizened and drawn. His eyes were hidden behind old-fashioned green spectacles. On his scant hair he wore an equally old-fashioned beaver hat, and a long black cape-coat reached below his knees. To cap this almost ridiculous outfit, the German professor carried firmly in one hand a bulging umbrella of indeterminate age.

"Well, sir," he addressed Pons in a high, shrill voice, "I hope you have found what has become of my esteemed colleague; it is certainly not to my liking to be detained much longer."

"Especially since your boat leaves tomorrow, eh, Doctor?" asked Pons quietly.

"Exactly. I don't want to miss it. But come, sir, tell us—you've discovered something?"

"Yes, I may say I have," replied Pons in that unfailingly calm

manner in which he was accustomed to make the most important announcements. "I look forward to producing the lost Mr. Faversham before the night is over."

Surprise stilled the room, following Pons's statement. Mecker flashed a glance of perplexity at me; I returned it. Only von Ruda remained unmoved; he did not ask, as I expected him to, whether Faversham would be found alive or dead, but only said that he hoped Pons was right, and that he would then be able to sail after all.

"To begin with," said Pons, "I should like to hear your story, Doctor."

"Again?" snapped the professor curtly. He shrugged. "I suppose I must go through with it. Must you have all of it?"

"All."

Von Ruda shrugged his shapeless shoulders again and began. "As you no doubt know, I have been visiting in London; I was in Paris and had arranged to meet my good friend and colleague, Professor Faversham, at his home directly on his return from Scotland. That was five days ago. I came to London, registered at the Adelphi, and that evening went to Faversham's home. He had just got in, and we spent some hours together. It was late when I returned to the hotel, as perhaps the clerks will tell you, if you care to inquire."

"Quite so. I have already done so. I am informed also that you left the hotel regularly each day some time before dawn. I take it you spent every day with Professor Faversham?"

"Yes. We were working together. That is, up to last night. I spent yesterday with Faversham. When I rose to go close to midnight, he volunteered to walk with me to the thoroughfare—the Strand, I believe it is called—where I could take a conveyance. We came out together to the front steps. There Faversham left me to get his raincoat, which was not far down the hall from the front door. I stood on the stoop to wait for him."

"How long did you wait?"

"I should say not quite ten minutes. Then I entered the house and looked for him. I had the open front door within sight at all times. He was not in the alcove, his raincoat had not been taken from its hook, he was not in the library, and finally, he was not on the stoop when I returned there. I called him, and my calls attracted the attention of the constable who brought me here tonight. Doubtless you already know his story."

"You say you glanced into the library. Could Dr. Faversham have been hiding in that room?"

"That is impossible, sir. If you have seen the room you will realize that the walls present even expanses of book-lined shelves. The only object at all large enough to conceal someone is the desk, and that is so placed that from the door fully three sides of it are visible."

Pons nodded. "There is a door leading from the library into an inner room. Could Professor Faversham have passed through this?"

A mirthless smile crossed the German professor's face. "No, no, my dear sir," he replied in an irritated voice. "That door was securely locked. Had you taken the trouble to investigate further, you would have seen that it leads into a narrow cupboard."

Pons paid no attention to von Ruda's caustic reply. "Of course, my dear Doctor, you realize that there is a flaw of some magnitude in the problem as it is being presented to us?"

"Indeed, Mr. Pons? Perhaps you would like to suggest that I myself made some magic to bring about my friend's disappearance without trace?"

"Nothing so crude, my dear Doctor, nothing so crude," replied Pons, chuckling. "But consider the logic of your statements. You say you had the door in sight every moment; this door is the only available mode of exit from the house. Yet, after having seen Professor Faversham enter the house, and having kept the only usable entrance under observation, you continue to hold that Faversham did not leave this house, in the face of the fact that Faversham is not now in it."

"Overlooking your rambling way of putting it, that is what I maintain."

"Did you look behind the raincoat?" asked Pons suddenly.

"Yes, I did."

"Suppose we wish to assume that Faversham had a reason to disappear. Suppose he were hiding behind the library door when you walked down to the alcove. If this were true, could he have stepped from the house at the moment when you looked behind the mackintosh?"

The professor's features underwent an almost ludicrous change. "If—I say, *if* that were true, yes, he could."

"Good! Very good!" exclaimed Pons. "We seem to be getting somewhere." He reached over now and picked up *Die Philosophie*. "Do you recognize this volume, Professor?"

"I do. I gave the book to Dr. Faversham as a Christmas gift in 1921."

"I gathered as much from the inscription." As he replaced the book, Pons asked, "At about what date did you dispatch this gift to Faversham?"

"I think it was sometime in the first week of December 1921."

Nodding, Pons rose from his chair. "I think that is all, Professor von Ruda."

"And Professor Faversham?" queried the German in his sharp, shrill voice.

"I am ready to produce him," said Pons tranquilly.

With these words he leaned forward easily and with one movement snatched the green spectacles from the face of the German scholar at the same time that he brought away most of the skillfully drawn lines on one side of the face. The fellow was up at a bound, and upon Pons, but Mecker collared him from behind.

"Professor Faversham—at our service," said Pons. To Mecker he added, "You may arrest him on the charge of attempting the embezzlement of ten thousand pounds of the funds of Merk College."

Faversham said nothing, but his eyes were steady in their intentness upon Pons. Pons sat down and drew out his pipe as casually as if he had done nothing unusual.

"My good Faversham," said Pons, "your scheme was too perfect. Your mind worked two paces ahead of the plan. You made your first mistake in this book—" he tapped *Die Philosophie* "when you dated a second edition printed in April 1922, as of Christmas, 1921. Your second error was in the matter of your books. When a man's library is stripped of all books possessing any intrinsic personal value—gift books, books with other pleasant associations such as a professor is in a position to receive—it is a safe guess to assume that all such books have been permanently shipped away. Certainly a professor on his leave would not take them along. Where, then, were they, and why were they gone?"

"The answer is fairly obvious. You entrenched yourself in the trust of the authorities of the college to such an extent that even now it will be difficult for them to believe in your duplicity. You hoped to vanish completely under suspicion of being the victim of foul play, so that you would not be sought, and then later you could turn up somewhere on the Continent as a respectable middle-aged

man—at that place to which you doubtless shipped your books before you went to Scotland.

"On your return then, you registered at the Adelphi as Dr. Hans von Ruda, whom you knew to have been retired from the University of Bonn in 1921, and who would therefore be difficult to locate at short notice. You knew also that inquiry might be made at Bonn, and you were quite safe there. Then, in order to substantiate your friendship, you obtained a copy of von Ruda's book and inadvertently dated the edition five months before it was printed. This you left for us to see—a kind of circumstantial evidence of a friendship which did not exist.

"As von Ruda you spent your nights at the Adelphi, but before dawn you left the hotel and spent your days as Professor Faversham, allowing yourself to be seen frequently by Dr. Dannel, a dependable witness who lived across the street, and who was permitted to see von Ruda also, so that he could testify to von Ruda's presence, if necessary. You even went to the extent of getting two passports, one for yourself and one for von Ruda. Your own you left on your library table to help give the impression of an unpremeditated departure.

"You failed to realize that you might be held as a material witness. Up to that point, you were relatively safe. Had you simply decamped with the money, you would have been hounded for the rest of your life; with Faversham given up for dead, you would be free to live your own life. And then when you saw that there were suspicions, you seized upon the first suggestion I made to alter your story—that perhaps Faversham had got out of the door while you were peering about in the alcove: this in the face of your emphatic denial of any such suggestion.

"Incidentally, your little manoeuvre of sleeping once on your cot was rather amusing. There is a great difference between sleeping once and five times in a bed, as the sheets and the impressions will quickly reveal to a careful observer. The single impression is consistently clear, the outlines usually quite plain, the sheets rumpled only in the place where you lay; but a number of impressions will produce a blurred and broadened rumpling and outline."

"Is that all?" asked the professor calmly.

"I fancy it will be quite enough, Dr. Faversham."

"Well, it has been an amusing hour, Mr. Pons," said the



professor in a relieved voice. "But I fear we shall have to bid you good-night."

He left the room, shepherded by Mecker, whose delight shone in his grateful eyes, as if he had not a care in the world. Pons strode to the window to watch them enter a cab.

"I fancy," he said over his shoulder, "Faversham might have been a really great criminal. The potentialities were there." His tone was almost regretful.

## *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus*

IT HAS OFTEN been said that truth is stranger than fiction, and I know of no better evidence in support of that statement than the facts attending the adventure of the Black Narcissus, as the crime is listed in my notes. There was little real deduction in Solar Pons's typical vein connected with the case; that is to say, the discovery of the murderer was in itself a comparatively simple problem, but the clue that presented itself was so curiously different that Pons was struck by it at once.

At five-thirty o'clock on a rainy May evening, Mr. Jackson Deming, a stockbroker, was found slain in his offices in Paternoster Row. Pons and I had been comparatively inactive that day; we read and wrote; I had little business, for my practise had not at that time taken on much significance. Initial knowledge of the affair reached us at seven o'clock, through the medium of the *Evening News*, which carried two small photographs, one showing the scene of the murder, the other the victim, taken from life. Between the two pictures, in rather well-inked print, was a *Wanted*:

### *Wanted for Murder!*

*A young man of medium height (five feet, seven inches), black hair, dark eyes (supposed brown), full black moustache on upper lip, thin firm lips, long arms; when last seen dressed in grey raincoat and number seven shoes.*

It was superscribed *Police Order*, and signed *Seymour R. Jamison*, the Scotland Yard Inspector in charge of the case, and one of Pons's most critical admirers, who very often brought his problems and difficulties to Pons's attention.

Pons, I remember, made some commonplace remark about the matter, and put the paper aside. Rain fell outside, and the twilight was still with that hush which falls along Praed Street just before darkness, so that the distant rumble of the trains at Paddington made a muted hum in the room.

It could not have been half an hour later when there came a sud-

den ring at the bell and, before either of us could move to answer it, there followed a wild clatter on the stairs. Pons, who was standing near the window, pulled aside the curtain and looked out. A cab stood below in the driving rain. A moment later the door flew open, and a wild-eyed young man, with a cap pulled low over his forehead, burst into the room.

"Which of you is Solar Pons?" he demanded, looking anxiously from one to the other of us.

Pons stepped away from the window, manifestly identifying himself.

"I am James T. Rudderford," said our visitor, flowing his words together in an agony of haste and obvious fright.

"Wanted for murder, I observe," said Pons. "Please sit down and compose yourself."

The young man pulled his cap from his head and stood staring at Pons with a mixture of fear and perplexity in his eyes, as if he did not know whether he had better turn in flight now or carry on. He did not move to take the chair Pons indicated.

Pons, however, was reassuringly casual. "But for the moustache that you shaved off somewhat awkwardly not long ago—cutting yourself in three places, incidentally—you might fit Jamison's *Wanted* description as well as any of a thousand or more other young men now in London."

Our visitor collapsed into a chair and covered his face with his hands. "Mr. Pons, I didn't do it."

"I should not have thought you came here to confess," said Pons quietly.

Rudderford raised his head and stared at Pons. "You believe me!" he cried in wide-eyed astonishment. "You don't know then. Every bit of evidence is against me, Mr. Pons—every bit!"

"Suppose you tell us just what happened," suggested Pons.

"Mr. Pons, I am a ruined man. Until yesterday I was moderately wealthy. Today I haven't a halfpenny. I have lost everything through speculation. I do not usually speculate, sir, but I took Deming's word. I had known him for some time, and I had no reason to believe that he was not honest." He shook his head, and his not unhandsome features clouded with sudden anger. "I confess I went up to his office this afternoon to kill him. I'd have done it, too—but someone had got there before me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pons, his interest manifestly quickening. "Let us start from the beginning, Mr. Rudderford."

"It wasn't until four o'clock that I discovered Claybar Mine had gone under. At first, I couldn't believe it; Deming had assured me that it was a dead certainty to go up. When I saw I was done for, I just simply lost my head. I know I took my revolver, put on my raincoat, and ran out of the house without my hat. I believe I ran all the way to Deming's office. There was no one on the main floor in the halls, and the lift was not running; so I had to go up the stairs. On the first flight I met an old charwoman descending. There was no one else.

"I got to the fourth floor and opened Deming's door slowly, just in case someone were in the outer office. But no one was. I crossed to the inner office, which stood open. I got halfway across that room when I moved into line with the desk in the inner office, and the first thing I saw was Deming's head on its side on the desk, mouth and eyes wide open. For a moment I didn't know what to think; I hesitated; then I went boldly on. I was so angry that it didn't seem to matter what he was doing, and I think I had the idea he was having me on a little by some kind of act. But at the threshold I saw what I hadn't been able to see before. Deming was dead. He had been stabbed in the back. Well, sir, when I saw that, I saw it was only by a miracle I had been saved from doing that very thing, and I turned and went back the way I had come.

"When I got down to the main floor, there was a newspaper-seller in the hall—took refuge from the rain, I think. He stepped in front of me and flourished a paper. I brushed him aside and ran out into the street. At seven o'clock I saw the *Evening News*, with my description. I saw then what a net I was in, shaved my moustache, and came directly here."

"Obviously the newspaper-seller described you to Jamison—an observant lad. And your footprints were taken on the stairs. Those are the circumstances of the evidence Jamison has to offer. You have a strong motive, you acted on impulse, you had the intention of committing the crime—yes, you have put yourself into a difficult position. But not a hopeless one."

"What shall I do, Mr. Pons?"

"Since you are doubtless being earnestly sought all over London, I suggest you stay here. I think Dr. Parker and I will go over to Deming's office and have a look around."

Pons doffed his smoking-jacket, and put on a light coat and his raincoat. Waiting for me at the door, he turned to our still-agitated client and reassured him. "I should not trouble myself too much if I

were you, Mr. Rudderford. Let us just see what I can do. Meanwhile, there are books here, if you care to read."

We descended to Praed Street and walked rapidly toward Paddington Station. The rain by this time had deteriorated into a heavy mist, which shrouded everything; wherever one glanced, heavy drops of moisture clung, reflecting light dimly in the murky atmosphere; all sounds were muffled and strange, and there lay in the air from time to time a stray scent of flowers or foliage, as if something of the country air had managed to invade London. We took the Underground at Paddington, rode to Aldersgate, and walked rapidly over to Paternoster Row.

The building in question was a recently erected office building, five storeys high. The constable at the door was young Mecker, still comparatively new to his work, but, as Pons had noticed earlier, rather observant for his limited experience.

He greeted us with a polite "Good-evening," adding, "I have orders to let no one pass; but I daresay you may go up. Inspector Jamison's there with the police doctor."

Pons paused to shake some of the moisture from his waterproof and light his pipe. "No doubt the murderer has already been apprehended. I could not help seeing Jamison's remarkably clear description of him in the *News*."

"We've already got thirty suspects," answered Mecker morosely.

Pons smiled dryly. "You should have at least two hundred more by midnight."

"Oh, surely not if they measure his shoes, Mr. Pons; sevens aren't that common."

"Not at all; but that won't be done at once in most cases; and the rest of the man is alarmingly prosaic."

We went up the stairs, seeing at different places sections blocked off, clearly indicating that footprints had been taken there.

"Jamison is thorough," said Pons.

Jamison was walking through the outer office as we entered: a bluff, hearty man, with a closely clipped moustache; the police doctor could be seen in the inner room, though it was obvious that his work had been completed.

"Pons!" exclaimed Jamison. "Whatever brought you down here tonight? I'm afraid this little matter has nothing of interest to offer. Simple vengeance by a swindled investor. We'll have our man in a few hours."

"I wish you luck, Jamison. You don't feel, then, that the description you offer through the papers is—shall we say, a little general?"

"Not at all. Taken overall, not at all general, no, sir!"

"Ah, well, a difference of opinion adds zest, eh, Jamison?"

"You'll want to see the body, I suppose?" asked Jamison a little stiffly.

"I did have that in mind."

Jamison led the way into the inner office just as the police doctor came out.

The body of the dead man lay in the position Rudderford had described to us. Projecting from his back was the handle of a common carving-knife, driven to the hilt into Deming's body. Pons walked around the body and came back to stand looking at it. It was clear that the knife had been driven into the victim with great force, and I thought of Rudderford, who could easily have had strength enough to use the weapon so forcefully.

"It is not clear who discovered the body," said Pons.

"The charwoman."

"At about what time does the doctor place the murder?"

"At or near five o'clock."

"Where was the charwoman at that time?"

Jamison made an impatient movement. "She was upstairs, cleaning the floor above. She had a good alibi, if you are thinking of her in connection with this. Deming's secretary left at half-past four, and stood in the hall talking with the char, who had just come in and was going on upstairs; they talked until a quarter to five. When she left, the char went upstairs. The char, incidentally, offers a good alibi for the secretary, for she says she saw Deming at work through the half-open door. The broker upstairs, a fellow by the name of Welkins, was still in his office and vouches that the char got there at about a quarter to five. She cleaned his office and then the hall; Welkins says he saw her cleaning the hall and stairs as late as twenty-past five. Then she came down, cleaning as she went. When she came in here, she found Deming like this. That was about half-past five. Welkins was still in his office then, working late, and he called us at once when he discovered why the char had screamed."

During this résumé Pons had been looking around without comment. He had examined the body to his satisfaction, and was now scrutinizing the desk, which was occupied by books, papers, a desk-

pad, and the various accoutrements to be expected there. However, there remained unaccounted for a rather singular object which lay behind a book at the rear of the desk. Pons leaned over and picked it up; it was a single black narcissus, still rather fresh, for it gave off a faint perfume.

"Where was this when the body was found?"

"Near the head."

"So?" Pons placed the flower parallel to the head and stepped back. Jamison nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, about like that. A little closer to his head, if anything."

"It was moved then. By whom?"

"The doctor, I think."

"Interesting. What do you make of it?"

Jamison was a little taken aback. "Why, nothing. Nothing at all." He hesitated and gazed at the flower again. "However, if you think it significant, I should be obliged to know why."

"Are you aware that a black narcissus is a rare and costly flower, and somewhat out-of-place in a situation like this? Surely you are not accustomed to finding black narcissi beside your corpses, Jamison! I should value this at about one pound ten."

Jamison made a sound of disgust. "Oh, rot, Pons! Deming was rich enough to buy a carload of the things. Why shouldn't he bring one of them to his office?"

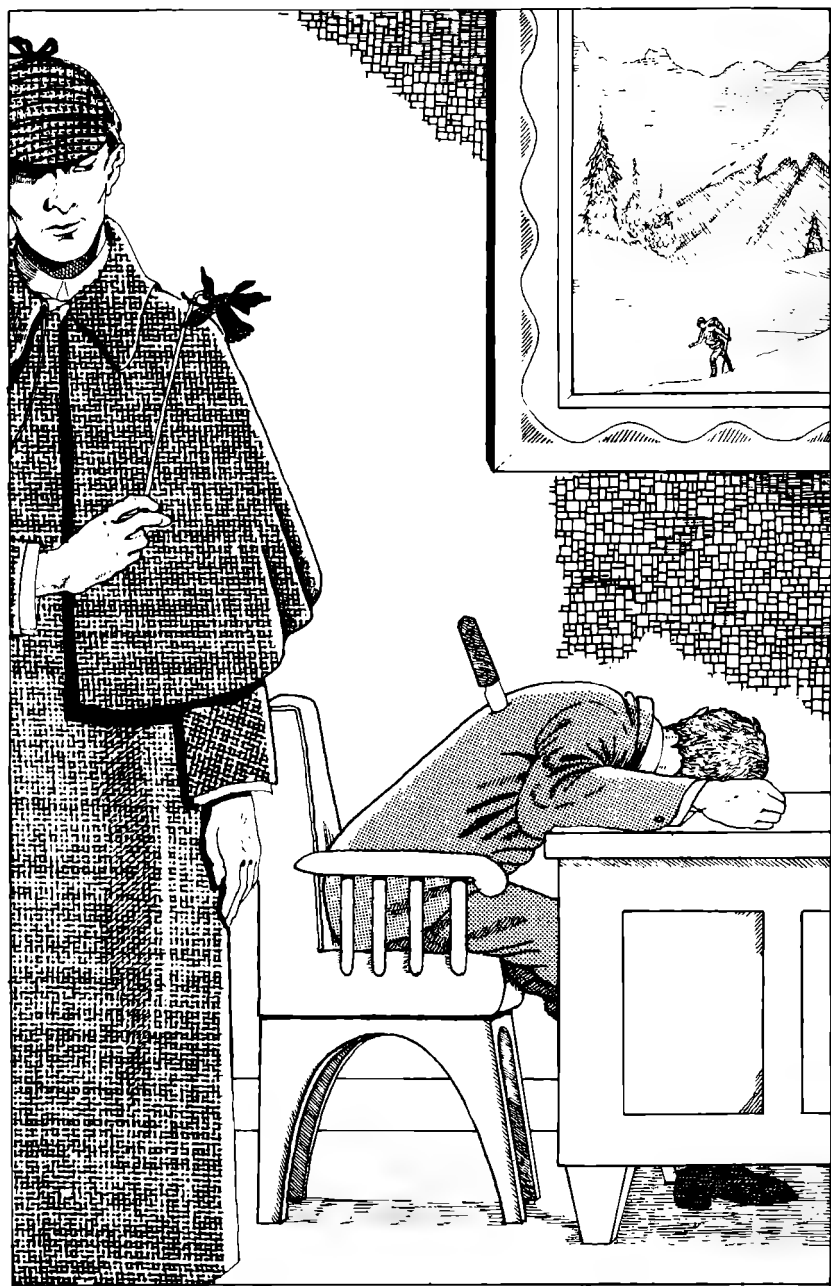
"Ah, and if so, why shouldn't he put it in water, if not in his lapel? No, I'm afraid that will not wash, Jamison. Observe: it is still quite fresh. As a matter of fact, it was removed from the florist's not later than four o'clock this afternoon and reached this desk at approximately five, leaving, as you might have noticed, spots on the desk blotter—raindrops, I submit."

"What you mean is that the murderer brought it."

"Surely it would seem so? Why not just telephone Deming's secretary and ask her if Deming himself brought it after luncheon? Or if it was here in his office when she left for the day. I'll wager she will admit to knowing nothing whatever of this curious flower."

Jamison looked at Pons in bafflement, his inability to follow the trend of Pons's thought quite discernible on his bluff features. There was, too, a suggestion of aggressive defiance. He turned just as Mecker, having been relieved by another constable below, came into the room, and gave the constable an order to telephone the secretary, who had been asked to remain at her home pending conclusion of the initial phase of the investigation.

Pons now returned to the body and bent to examine the hilt of







the knife, looking at it from all sides.

"You noticed this legend burned into the handle, I daresay?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Yes. *From Emily.*"

"Does it not suggest to you that Deming knew someone named Emily?"

"Oh, that is possible, but surely you don't propose that the murderer left a calling card?"

Pons smiled grimly. "I should hardly need to suggest so obvious a fact. I gave that to you."

"Look, Pons—the knife. . . ."

"I am not speaking of the knife," interrupted Pons. "But of the black narcissus."

"Oh, that. . . ." Jamison sighed.

At this moment Mecker appeared on the threshold. "Deming's secretary says that Deming did not like flowers, and there was certainly no flower of any kind in either office when she left late this afternoon."

"I put it to you, Jamison," said Pons, "that the significance of the black narcissus cannot any longer be avoided. I earnestly suggest that you concern yourself with discovering the meaning of the flower. I commend to your attention especially the files of the newspapers, which might possibly reveal a connection between Deming and the flower."

Thereupon Jamison burst into a flood of remonstrances, to the effect that, since the murderer was already being sought by the police, surely there was no need to trouble one's self about the appurtenances which had in any case only a dubious relation to the crime. Pons paid little attention to him; he walked to the outer office, seated himself at the secretary's desk, and took up pencil and paper.

Jamison watched him write, silent now, and biting his heavy lips in vexation.

Pons looked up presently, after having written rapidly for a few moments.

"If you have some knowledge I do not have, I think it only fair that you tell me," said Jamison then.

"Quite right. In the first place, then, the young man for whom you are advertising did not commit the murder."

"I am somewhat familiar with your methods, Pons, but I don't follow you."

"There is for one thing, the matter of footprints," said Pons. "I

doubt the possibility of tracing them through to the inner office, however wet the shoes were, but if by chance the prints could be traced, I think you would find that they stopped at the threshold. It may be possible to so trace them, and I suggest you try to find the print of a number seven shoe in the inner office anywhere beyond the threshold. That should settle the matter to your satisfaction since the knife could not have been hurled from the threshold."

"Mecker took the prints on the stairs, after we had the newspaper-boy's story. But how do you suspect that? I confess I see nothing to indicate it."

"Obviously, because the man you want told me so himself."

Jamison looked the astonishment he felt.

"And by reason of the fact that he should seek my help, he is innocent; he would never otherwise have done so. From him, too, I learned that at the time he made entry to the building, he encountered a woman he took to be a char coming down—an old woman wearing a shawl over her head."

"We have a record of her."

"Ah, who was she?"

Jamison shrugged. "We don't know."

"Ah, well, I will tell you. It was she who murdered Deming."

"Fantastic!"

"Slowly, slowly, Jamison. You proceed from the theory that the young man committed the crime. I proceed from the premise that he did not. We are thus left with no alternative but the old woman. However implausible or impossible that may sound, I think you will find it to be the ultimately correct explanation. And to facilitate that end, I have here prepared two notices, which ought to appear in all the papers tomorrow. I have taken the liberty of attaching your name to one of them, Parker, and yours to the other, Jamison."

He passed over to Jamison the two notices he had written, and I read them over the Inspector's burly shoulder.

"Found: a large kitchen-knife, of the type commonly used for carving fowl, with *From Emily* burned on the handle near the blade. Owner will please apply to Dr. Lyndon Parker, Number Seven, Praed Street, Apartment 7B." The second notice was more concise: "Will the florist who yesterday, between opening hours and five p.m., sold a single black narcissus to an elderly lady wearing a shawl, please communicate at once with Inspector Jamison at New Scotland Yard."

Jamison looked up, perplexed. "Still going on about that narcissus, Pons."

"I believe it holds the key to our puzzle." Pons smiled. "You'll see that these notices reach the papers, I hope. And if you do set Mecker to looking for footprints of a size seven shoe in the inner office, I would appreciate having a report of his findings in the morning. Furthermore, you can oblige me by coming around when your notice is answered."

"Very well, I'll do it."

Pons touched a match to his pipe, which had gone out. "I think we've done all we can. Ready, Parker?"

We found young Rudderford in an agony of apprehension on our return, but Pons had no great difficulty calming him, telling him only that he must be prepared to make a truthful deposition about his part in the matter, and delivering himself of a few remarks about the potential murderer and the fear of punishment. Following Rudderford's return to his own home, Pons spent some time going through a bulky compendium of newspaper accounts of his own compilation—a collection of scrapbooks containing many thousands of stray bits of information relative to frauds, murders, larcenies, and other offenses against the law. He was still at this long after I went to bed.

In the morning Pons examined the papers for the notices he had written. He found them easily, and observed to Jamison's credit that the evening's *Wanted* had vanished. We prepared ourselves to await an answer to the knife advertisement, though Pons was not at all sure that such an answer would be forthcoming, admitting the possibility that the owner of the knife may not have missed it, or may quite probably have been the murderess herself.

At shortly after one o'clock, Jamison appeared.

"Well, Jamison?" asked Pons, looking at the Inspector through the haze of smoke in the room, though the expression on Jamison's face told its own story.

"You were right, Pons," said Jamison, sitting down. "Mecker did manage to trace footprints to the threshold, but there they stopped. There were nines and tens in the inner office, and that's all we found, though we looked half the night. The weather made it possible even after the prints had dried."

Pons nodded cursorily. "It is the notice in which I am interested. Any answer?"

"A florist in Cheapside telephoned at noon to say he had sold a black narcissus to the woman you described. Cost: one pound. It was sold at around four o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons.

"I'm not so sure, Pons. Admitting that the young man for whom we advertised did not commit the crime, we are confronted with the fact that a woman—an old woman, mind you, who yesterday bought a black narcissus, for what reason I have still not been able to ascertain—stabbed Deming with a common carving-knife, and with such strength that the knife went into him up to the hilt. Is that tenable?"

"That is the situation as I see it, Jamison. You need only ask yourself what peculiar conditions need to be satisfied to make it possible." He reached down among a stack of papers near his arm-chair, and, after rummaging among them, he came forth with one and pointed to a photograph. "Could this person, for instance, have done it?"

Jamison favoured the photograph with a long, cold stare, and I did likewise. The photograph, in a paper of two days past, was that of an old woman. Beneath it appeared her name: Emily Riswall, and above, in black type: *Escaped from Strathbone Asylum for the Insane.*

Whatever Jamison might have said was cut short by a sharp ring at our bell.

A few moments later, Mrs. Johnson ushered in a thin, slatternly woman, who stood hesitantly on the threshold.

"Come in, come in, my good woman," said Pons.

Thus invited, she ventured three steps—just far enough to permit the door to close behind her—and stood looking from one to another of us.

"You are looking for Dr. Parker, I presume," continued Pons.

"Yes, sir," she said nodding.

"You've come for your knife," continued Pons, in his role.

She nodded, and Pons went into his laboratory and brought out an exact duplicate of the knife which had been used to kill Deming; he had evidently prepared this after I had gone to bed the previous night. He handed it to her and waited while she looked it over, turned it to where *From Emily* was burned on the handle, and nodded with a satisfied, if somewhat worried, air.

"It's mine, all right."

"May I ask how you came to lose it?"

"It was stolen from me."

"Ah? Only the knife?"

For a moment our visitor hesitated. "Well, sir, I guess the same person what took the knife took the two pound' I had hid in the tea-pot."

"Took a knife and two pounds, eh?" Pons looked at her earnestly. "Someone who knew the house, I take it, and knew where you kept your money."

The woman nodded emphatically. "Yes, sir, and so I thought. I kep' an eye on 'Enery—that's my 'usband—because I thought he'd done it, 'specially when he said that he couldn't get home on account of the rain yesterday. The night of the same day the money was took—that was yesterday, after I come back from a neighbour's house—I found ten shillings back in the tea-pot. Then I knew 'twasn't 'Enery, because he'd have spent it all." She looked at the knife. "And this knife, now—I wouldn't care much for it, but seeing as it was a present from my dear sister Emily, I took a fancy to it."

"And your name?" asked Pons.

"Clymer. Mrs. 'Enery Clymer."

"Your sister's?"

"Hers was Riswall. She married a good-for-nothing who shot 'imself and she went out of her 'ead, poor thing." She sniffled a little. "She's been in the asylum these ten years."

"I think you've proved your right to the knife, Mrs. Clymer. You may keep it."

"Thank you, sir." She backed toward the door, a little suspiciously. "Good-day, sir." And she was gone.

Jamison stared after her in bewilderment. By this time the Inspector was convinced that Pons was correct, but he had not yet discovered the essential explanation of the mystery. However, he was not to be kept long in ignorance.

"A curious affair," mused Pons, sitting down again, with one volume of his encyclopedia of clippings. "I take it you spent very little time on the black narcissus, Jamison."

"Mecker is looking the matter up."

"Well, we have it here." He was leafing through the pages as he spoke, and now stopped. "It would appear—this is from the *Daily Telegraph* of about a decade ago—that the *Black Narcissus* was the name of a spurious mine, through which Deming, who promoted it, mulcted investors of a good many thousand pounds.

Among stockholders suffering the greatest losses when it crashed in 1918 were Sir Evelyn Mansfield, Selwyn Carington, Thomas Gainbridge, and James Riswall. Riswall lost his entire savings and shot himself on the same day. Observe the similarity of the pattern, for that was your young man's experience; his name, by the way, is James T. Rudderford, and he is prepared to make a deposition as soon as you call on him. Shortly after this event, mention of the *Black Narcissus* so enraged Riswall's widow that she made a murderous attack on Deming, inflicting some injuries. As a result, she was confined to Strathbone Asylum for the Insane, labouring under an obsession to revenge her husband by killing Deming. You will observe, Jamison, the outcome of the obsession, and the singular significance of the flower left on Deming's desk."

"It's clear now, Mr. Pons—or reasonably clear, at any rate," said Jamison, with some trace of bewilderment still in his eyes. "But we haven't got the murderer, after all."

Pons shrugged. "Technically, there is none. The woman will be found, I think, somewhere about the home of her sister, whose statements you will have to take. You might watch for her there."